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INTRODUCTION

Of early dramatic writings,—writings antecedent in composition to *Kiartan the Icelander,* and hitherto unpublished,—only the *Guanche Idyl* is here preserved. Nearly all the short earlier poems are included, along with others which, for the most part, appeared in the columns of the *Spectator, Athenæum,* and *English Review.* Cordial thanks are due to the Proprietors and Editors of these journals for the kind permission here to reprint them.

Among immature writings, for technical reasons excluded, there is one which must be named as recalling by its inscription much unstinted encouragement given in early days by Swinburne and Watts-Dunton, as also later by George Meredith; encouragement without which the contents of this volume would never have seen the light. For even then the grey mildew of moral anarchism, first imported from sad Russia, had begun to desiccate and interdict the fresh branchings of our indigenous art. Generous welcome was not lacking; but the fashionable coteries were powerful to ostracise, and the vogue favoured only tragedy of the cynical or squalid anagnorisis,—the marish gloom, not the night that unveils the stars.

Although wholesome work is still current, this foreign incubus lies heavy upon us. The dignities of heroic art are disparaged, and a pseudo-realism is in demand, which consists, not in vital and universal truth, but in the uses of idioms, episodes, and

issues of the passing hour. The self-styled intellectuals form a kind of Irreligious Tract Society, in whose novels, poems, or anecdotal stage homilies some one of the social honesties or fidelities is challenged or ridiculed, some shock or stab is dealt to those old chivalries, pieties, and magnanimities wherein rest the sweetness and stability of life. So well indeed has the art of shocking been exploited, that little now remains save by the praise of decency to shock the shockers.

It is pertinent to the matter of this volume to remark that the assault is specially directed against Christianity, which is travestied as the religion of slaves. The battery is, however, in effect levelled against the ethics of all nobler civilisations; and the fashionable philosopher is that German Machiavel, whose distinctive propagandum is the cult of the Cat-Man, cruel, lithe, and treacherous: distinctive, I say, because, for the rest, his ethics of courage and the will-to-live are platitudes of Christianity itself. The literary cults of to-day are the moral conventions of to-morrow; and cruelty, unscrupulousness and social infidelity are virulent bacilli to breed. The disease may wear a hectic look simulating health; but many Babylons and Gomorrahs are writ red in the chart of history to mark social epidemics which incubated in this hoary old philosophy now newly faked to look ruddy and fresh. Long before the supreme tragedy which was to give hope and courage to 2000 years, the archetypal tragedian, optimist, and universalist dramatised the *κοινοφιλὴς διάνοια*,[1] the concept of universal love as the saviour of human society. Ever the coinophilic groups widen, and old gulfs are bridged: yesterday the Hellenic demes; to-day the European alliances; to-morrow democracy and aristocracy. The Machiavellian strife of merely

[1] See Aesch. *Eum.* 980-7: compare *Ag.* 1189-90, 1564-5, etc.; *Cho.* 1073-6 and *Eum.* 857-66. Also generally *Ag.* 1669, etc., and *Eum.* 526-65, etc.

egoistic mastery is "a quarrel of domestic fowl," postponing the nobler wrestle of the ultimate groups, the strife of the Mind's mastery over material forces, the inward kingdom's control of the outward. For though *parare bellum* is still wise counsel, the humanities and sciences grow only in the release from broil. Espying the tower builded of the children of men to rule the earth and search out the starry heavens, thus spake the jealous God of the primitive sage: "Behold, they are one people and they have all one language; and this is what they begin to do: and now nothing will be withholden from them, which they purpose to do." Wherefore he sent Machiavels among them to breed confusion of races; but in the fullness of time came the gospel of coinophilism to build anew the city of the cosmic search. The cult of the vulgar overstrapper dubbed "superman" is in truth a dilettante atavism toward the barbaric; a shallow reaction from the deep stream of human tendency. This world-movement marks an evolution anthropologically as distinct as in plant life the advance from endogen to exogen,—from the stem conglomerate of haphazard small bundles to that higher organism whereof the steadfast communal trunk deepens inward, ramifying outward in flower and foliage far richer and more complex. Nor, as the biologist knows, is advance achieved save by altruism and self-abnegation, in particular toward the rearing of young life; those ties and disciplines against which modernity rebels. What recompense of hallowed association clings round these ligaments they may never know, whose social pieties the modern mildew corrupts. For it is in the heart of nature to weave sacred strands knitting past with present and life with life: nay, science attributes a mnemic conscience even to the lilies of the field. Assuredly of humanity no egoistic superman, no tumid anthropic cells, are the flower and crown; but the brotherly and debonair, the Shakespearian multiman, whose kingdom expands inwardly

by an ever richer observation, knowledge, and imagination, kindled and fructified by love of nature and mankind.

Machiavel wrote his own cynical pseudo-realistic plays to illustrate his philosophy; the fashionable German supplies the text for our latter-day cynical pseudo-realists; but *Mandragola* and *Clizia*, along with *Dodsley's Old Plays*, remain in witness how unreal, at their best, these pseudo-realists in time appear; how, as Ben Jonson said of their prototype, the plays of Plautus and Terence, "they antiquated and deserted lie"; while the Periclean Greeks, the Elizabethan English, and the continental romanticists, whose traffic is with universals, remain for ever young.

If, then, there is no appeal against the fashions of the hour, those to whom the stories of past times shine, and the old fidelities and chivalries are as music, may yet keep a lonely vigil, happy in the sympathy of a few, hopeful that a deeper and more scientific philosophy may carry with it neither a razing nor a constriction, neither anarchy nor tyranny, but the growth of new beauties and sublimities germinating from the living branches of the old.

KIARTAN THE ICELANDER

To F. H.

When at one winter's end our boy looked forth
Through wondering eyes upon the glad green earth,
  Truly it seemed that in this laughing child
All clouds were pierced, all troubles turned to mirth,
  And dawn upon our fields of Enna smiled.

And when this Music dwelt within our nest,
More bird than boy, a five years' fondled guest,
  A rose with blushing petals half unfurled,
It was as though the lips of Love had pressed
  A kiss upon the bosom of the world.

Yet if the fledgling ailed we held our breath,
Or hid his cheeks in ours, for fear that Death
  Watched him as one who watcheth hour by hour
Some rare bud ripen, till one day he saith:
  "Now is it time to pluck the perfect flower."

But if he smiled, 'twas in such winning wise,
The whole world's joy seemed sparkling in his eyes;
  And if he wept the eyes of all waxed dim:
For still he moved like Morning in the skies,
  And zones of light and laughter went with him.

He is so fair, this little son of ours!
Fresh as cool dew among the meadow flowers,
  Swift as blue-breasted swallows on the wing,
Bright as the sunlight chasing April showers,
  Glad as the first gold-dappled day of Spring!

His voice, his look, his laughter,—these dispel
All clouds and woes. Oh Time, forbear thy knell!
  Wreck not this Music; spare to this sweet elf
His amaranth wreath, his crown of asphodel,
  Fit for the world's one Angel, Love Himself!

PERSONS

Men of the Dales.

- Olaf Hoskuldson, *a chieftain.*
- Kiartan [1] — Halldor — Steinthor — *his sons.*
- Bolli,[2] *Kiartan's friend and foster-brother.*
- Oswif the Wise, *a chieftain.*
- Uspak — Helgi — *his sons.*

Snorri the Priest (*Odin's religion*), *a chieftain.*
Thorod Scatcatcher, *his sister's husband.*
Kalf Asgeirson, *brother to Hrefna.*
Gizur — Hialti — *Christian priests.*
Liot, *the blind Skald or poet.*
An Old Man.

Gudrun, *daughter of Oswif.*
Hrefna, *sister of Kalf.*
Thorgerd, *wife of Olaf.*
Thordis, *wife of Oswif.*
Wala, *a little girl.*

A Skipper from Norway; a Thrall from Norway; Thralls of Iceland; Guests at Herdholt; Sailors; Liegemen of the Chieftains, &c.

[1] Pronounce Kiārtan.

[2] Pronounce Bōlli.

SCENES

ACT I

HERDHOLT; OLAF'S SEAT. THE PLAYMEAD.

ACT II

IN FRONT OF THE TEMPLE OF THOR AT HOLYFELL, THE SEAT OF SNORRI.

ACT III

HERDHOLT. THE GUEST HALL.

ACT IV

HERDHOLT. THE GUEST HALL.

ACT V

INTERIOR OF A BARN.
Thrown open at the end of the Act, so as to disclose a great ravine.

Place and Time : Iceland, A.D. 966–1003.

ACT I

SCENE.—*The Playmead in front of Herdholt, the seat of Olaf Hoskuldson: Broadfirth in the distance. To left youths wrestling in a ring; also a target with the head of Loki, the Evil Spirit,—the mark being his eye. Watching the sports from beneath a birch-grove, Olaf Hoskuldson, his wife Thorgerd, and their sons Kiartan, Halldor, and Steinthor, with others of his family; Oswif the Wise, his wife Thordis, their daughter Gudrun, and their sons Uspak and Helgi. Liot, the blind Skald, sits in the background among the birches with his harp. Kiartan sits at the feet of Gudrun, holding her hand. Engaged in sports, among others, are Bolli, and, as umpire, Snorri the Priest. Hrefna is seen picking flowers on the green, in company with the little girl Wala.*

Loud cheering as the curtain rises.

Kiartan. Hurrah !

Olaf. Hurrah !

Oswif. Humph !

Thorgerd. Pray, what now, my son ?

Kiartan. Bolli, my foster-brother, shot three arrows
Clean through the eye of Loki.

Thordis [*to Gudrun*]. See, my daughter !
Kiartan applauds, but you of the house of Kiallak,—
You, his betrothed, sit calm. 'Tis very sure
I have not taught you so.

Uspak [*her son*]. That's Gudrun's way.
She thinks herself the golden goddess Freya.
When Master Bolli visits us at Laugar
He gobbles Gudrun with his eyes; but she
If ever he open his mouth to speak a word
Turns to sour apples, till he bites his lip.
She dubs him "Kiartan's shadow"——
Gudrun. Yea, in sooth!
Easier to snatch the shadow from a man
Than part those foster-brothers!
Uspak. —So, by Thor,
She'd kiss the ground her Kiartan treads upon,
But shies like any filly at his shadow.
Helgi. That's true. She can't abide him.
Thordis. Fie, my sons!
Now you will shame us all. Dear goodman Olaf,
They do but jest. My daughter, tell him so.
Gudrun. He knows it. Do you not, dear uncle?
Olaf. Aye:
And like them all the better.
Gudrun. As for Bolli,
If I say little it is to tease my Kiartan.
One day mayhap he'll tire of me; and then
There's that in hand to feed the dying flame.
Thordis. What! Make him jealous?
Gudrun. Nay, you know not Kiartan.
If you would please him, sing his Bolli's praise.
That I shall do when grown too old to charm:
We keep our dearest favours for the last:
Do we not, Mother Thorgerd?
Thorgerd. Ah, you rogue!
Kiartan will teach you!
Gudrun. He thinks he does already:

And so he learns. When maids are taught by men,
Rivers will travel upward to the hills.

Loud cheering.

Kiartan. Flat as a fish sack! Hurrah! The third man down.

Olaf. Well wrestled, Bolli!

Oswif. Humph!

Thorgerd. Pray, Father Oswif,
Find me a stool. You great men top us pigmies;
We're missing all the play.

Uspak. Pooh! It is nought.
Only Bull Bolli tossed a milking Kalf.

Olaf. Ha! ha! Kalf Asgeirson to wit.

Thorgerd. Hush, husband!
Yonder is pretty Hrefna, culling flowers
With Wala: Kalf, her brother, is her idol;
I trust she has not heard you.

Olaf. Yea, goodwife:
That was a churlish laugh. I'll nip my tongue off.

Enter Wala.

Kiartan. Ho, little Wala. Tired of buttercups?

Wala. Hrefna has made a crown for Lady Gudrun,
All of dear goldielocks and water-lilies.

Thorgerd. For Gudrun, not herself—'tis like the wench.

Wala. Yes, and she tells me tales about a snake,
Named Fafnir. He lay coiled upon a hill,
Guarding a heap of gold, and spitting poison;
Then came a hero with a sword, and killed him.
What is a snake?

Kiartan. Hooded,—with fangs and scales,—
Like Snorri, who guards his gold at Holyfell.

Uspak. Oho! By Thor, that's good! D'ye hear that, Helgi?
Kiartan called Snorri a snake.
Helgi. And folk do say
He wears chain-armour 'neath his jerkin.
Uspak. Scales!
Olaf. Tongues long enough to wag of Snorri, lads,
May twist the gossip's neck.
Oswif. Humph! That is true.
Uspak. D'ye hear, young Kiartan?
[*To the guests.*] Kiartan called him snake,—
Not I: remember that.
Kiartan. Folk may wot well
I wish the priest no harm; although one day
'Tis like enough he'll priest us out of Herdholt.
Olaf. Not while I live, nor you, my son.
Kiartan. No, father:
'Tis but my jest: here all of us are friends.
Wala. What is a hero, master Kiartan? Hrefna says
Sigurd, who killed the snake, was just like you,—
And you'll be a hero some day, so she said.
Gudrun [*to Kiartan*]. How the child chatters! What are you to Hrefna?
Run away, Wala. *Exit Wala.*
Thorgerd [*following the child with her eyes*]. Chirrup chirrup—see—
She flies from bough to bough,—the little sparrow;
And all that she hears, like Fafnir's birds, she'll blab of.
My star! She's running straight to goodman Snorri!
Olaf. Kiartan, our son, called Snorri a snake, like Fafnir;
Sigurd slew Fafnir—Kiartan is like Sigurd.
If she tells all, wife, that is what she'll tell.
Now here's a business! *Loud cheering.*

Uspak. Bolli is down ! Hurrah !

Kiartan. Who flung him ?

Uspak. Biorn, the Broadwick Champion :
More than your match, young Kiartan, I'll be sworn,
Brag as you may.

Gudrun. Who has heard Kiartan brag ?
I have not.

Uspak. No, for when there's aught against him,
All of you straightway sit upon your ears.
I say that Biorn's the strongest man in Iceland.

Helgi. And I say—Kiartan.

Kiartan. Bolli has met his match ;
And therefore I have.

Gudrun. So dear Burly says.
Perhaps he has not wrestled with his shadow :
You see the two would always fall together.

Olaf. We talk and talk, but think not. Liot, yonder,
Closes his lips upon a world of thoughts,
His eyes on visions, and on future things.

Liot [*singing with a great voice*].

Weavers, I warn you,
Words are your bobbins :
They go in and out,
Spinning your fates.
Liot the watcher
Likes not the pattern.
Nigh empty the spools are,
Nigh covered the warp.

Oswif. Humph !

Olaf. Skald, your words are true ! We talk too much.

Thordis [*to Thorgerd*]. Uncanny folk these Skalds. What think you, Mother ?

Thorgerd. They set me all of a shiver, down my back.

Thordis. Just as if folk must sit like pines in winter,
Dropping a syllable now and then, like snow.
So I tell Oswif. All he says is " Humph " :
So people call him wise. As for this Biorn,
There's talk of him and Thurid, Thorod's wife,—
Thorod, scat-catcher hight.

Helgi. Aye, so they call him ;
For that he found a shipwrecked Orkney crew,
And bade them drown or yield up all their freight :
Thus he gat wealth, and wedded Snorri's sister.

Thordis. So runs the tale.

Halldor. A pair with Snorri ; indeed
Their heads are much together at Holyfell.
Thorod's a coward. His wife and Master Biorn
Make him their sport ; and never a hare so tame.

Gudrun. Laughter has killed more causes than the sword :
If I were Thurid, I'd copy goodwife Unn.

Thorgerd. Unn—goodwife Unn ? I've heard no tale of her.

Gudrun. Minded to change her husbands—for, in sooth,
Those pretty Icefirth ducklings shed their lords
Like birds their feathers,—Unn took thread and shears
And made his shirt as low, and kirtles long
As any maid's ; then set the tale agog :
" Unn's husband is a woman." Next, betimes,
While all the roost was tittering, Unn divorced him,
Laughing the noodle out of court. And now,
Being much in love with Rolf, a married man,
She meets him, journeying to the booths, and says :
" You have heard what folk are saying ? " " No," says he.
—" Your goodwife rides in breeches, like a man."—

" First time I've heard it," answers Rolf. Then Unn :
" It shall not be the last." Nor was it. So
Once more all Icefirth chuckles ; and betimes
Rolf marries Unn, and puts his wife away ;
Who now, poor soul, found none to fight her battle ;
For all are dead of laughing.

Enter Snorri, amid laughter.

Snorri. Now, by Thor,
You fine folk of the Dales are merry men.
Prithee let humble Snorri share your mirth.
Olaf. " Humble," in sooth ! Nay, Priest, we know our betters :
As for our mirth, wherever Gudrun goes
There goes the laughter.
Snorri. Gudrun, gay and stately !
Bows to her.
But what of Kiartan ? The whole field cries for Kiartan.
Herdholt without its hero is, I swear,
Like Hindfell without Sigurd.
Helgi [*aside*]. " Sigurd "—" hero " :
Heard you that, Uspak ?
Uspak. Aye : good fat will fizzle.
Thorgerd [*aside to Thordis*].
My star ! Here's mischief.
Oswif. Humph !
Olaf. Nay, nay, good Snorri :
My son is but a peaceful lad,—no Sigurd :
Though there be witty folk who call him so,—
And just, forsooth, because the boy, like Sigurd,
Weds with one Gudrun. So the tales will roll,
Waxing like snowballs. See the youngster yonder,

Fain of his fair,—no mischief-making Sigurd
But just a staunch home-loving lad.

They talk aside.

Thordis [*aside to Thorgerd*]. There goes
A blood-feud blown away like thistle down.

Uspak [*aside to Helgi*]. By Thor, a rampant seed is that for growing !

Thorgerd [*aside to Thordis*]. Aye, that is just my Olaf,—peacemaker born.
Not that there's any wight could hurt our Kiartan,—
The noble son he is,—so straight and tall ;
And only yesterday a little lad
Scaling the cliff for gulls and guillemots,—
A fish to swim, a falcon on the rocks :
Taking his clouts and kisses like a man,
And many a clout to shield another lad,
Bolli above them all, and ne'er a whimper :
To you I say it as being one of us
Now that your Gudrun weds him,—there is not
A better lad in Iceland.

Thordis. That is sure ;
And Gudrun, for all the stately maid she is,
Mopes after him, when he is out of sight,
Much like my dappled cow, my pet, my Glossy,
Lowing, full uddered, when her calf is weaned.
Well, to be sure, a noble pair they are.

Olaf [*to Kiartan*]. Up, man ! Do Uncle Snorri reverence.

Kiartan rises and bows.

Snorri. Good luck to Kiartan ! Now you come of age,
Young sir, our privilege is to do you honour.
Pass round the Bragi-cup—we'll drink his health.

Thorgerd. Thanks, Uncle Snorri : I will rouse the thralls.

Exeunt Thorgerd and Thordis.

Olaf [*to Kiartan*]. And meanwhile, lad, some play.
Kiartan. None liefer ; but—
Gudrun. Always a but when Bolli holds the field.
Snorri. Afraid of Bolli ?
Gudrun. Nay, good Uncle Snorri :
Kiartan fears not to give a foe his fall ;
Only to outstrip a friend.
Snorri. Too squeamish, lad.
Kiartan. By Gudrun's leave, I'll try a turn with Biorn.
Snorri. Said like a hero. Way for Kiartan there !

Enter Bolli.

Kiartan. Hey, man, a tumble ? That's no wonder. Biorn
Had not, like you, been wrestling all the day :
All folk could see you were the freshman's match.
Uspak. Some, beside Bolli, draw the longbow nicely.
Bolli. 'Tis more than I saw, Kiartan.
Olaf. Come, and drink.

Exeunt the men — Gudrun remains ; and in the background Liot the Skald at his harp, and Hrefna with her flower garland.

Gudrun. Come, pretty Hrefna : Here am I alone.
Your hands are full of summer, like your smile.
Was ever a wreath so fair ? Who wove it ?
Hrefna. I :
To deck the dearest brow in Iceland.

Places it on Gudrun's head.

Gudrun. Mine ?
Oh, thanks ! See, Kiartan looks this way, admiring.
I'll wear it when he drinks the Bragi-cup.
Hrefna. Will you ? O, Gudrun, that was all my dream :
To be a fragment of your festival,
A little star out-glistened by the moon.

Queen o' the Dales we call you, dearest Gudrun.
Gudrun. No queen, but only an Iceland girl. Sit here:
If Kiartan in the wrestling take a fall,
Hrefna will cheer me.
Hrefna. That can never be:
None can throw Kiartan: Kalf, my brother, said it.
Gudrun. That is the truth; but when I say the like,
My brothers mock me. They are envious men.
Hrefna [*warmly*]. How can they help but love him? All folk do.
Gudrun. Men call you "Dawn"; I call you "Evening sky."
You glow, and then turn crimson. Do you fear me?
Think you that I am jealous, like my brother?
No: for what music makes the air so sweet
As praise of those we love? Come, tell your doings
At Willowdale, while Kiartan sojourned with you.
He was so happy.
Hrefna [*brightly*]. Did he say so?
Gudrun. Yes.
Ah, little witch, we must beware of you:
You blush again; and as for Kiartan, he
Harps on your praises like a Skald.
Hrefna. Mine, Gudrun?
We scarcely spoke. He is my brother's friend.
Kalf, Bolli and Kiartan were together always,
Preparing all their plans.
Gudrun. What plans, dear Hrefna?
Hrefna. Oh, there is much to do: canvas, and stores,
Arms, and the faring gear—
Gudrun. Is Kalf to be
My Kiartan's groomsman at our wedding feast?
Kiartan returned to-day: he has not told me.

Hrefna. Nay : will you wed before they go ?
Gudrun. Go whither ?
Hrefna. To Norway.
Gudrun. Do your brothers sail then ?
Hrefna. Soon.
Are they not Kiartan's partners in the ship ?
Gudrun. What ship ?
Hrefna. Sure, Gudrun knows ?
Gudrun. Nothing, child, nothing !
When do they sail ?
Hrefna [*distractedly, as she watches with eagerness the wrestlers*].
When the wind veers, I think.
Loud cheering from the field.
There ! Did you see ?
Gudrun. I see a web half spun,
And her that holds the rock.
Hrefna [*excitedly*]. Kiartan has conquered !
There is no hero in the world like Kiartan.
O happy Gudrun !
Gudrun. A plot of Asgeir's chickens !
Hrefna knows all, and I, his own betrothed,
Nothing ! To gain more time they plan this voyage ;
They think to win him in the end for Hrefna . . .
You shall not win him, girl ! Or, if you do,
He is a man accursed : your deed shall doom him.
There ! Do you hear ? I swear it by the gods !
Hrefna. O, Gudrun, hear me ! I have done nothing : I——
Gudrun. Troll ! I believe you not. You love my Kiartan.
'Tis scribbled like a rune upon your face.
Hrefna. Yes, I do love him ; and the more——
Gudrun. Confess, then :
You plotted this ; you wish to wed him——
Hrefna. False !

I love him dearly. He loves you, not me ;
Therefore I'd liefer die than take him from you !

Gudrun. Liar !

Exit Gudrun. Hrefna bursts into tears.
Enter Kalf.

Kalf. How goes the little sister ? What ! In tears ?
The idol flouts the offering. . . . No ? What then ?

Hrefna [*passionately*]. O Kalf ! Make Kiartan stay in Iceland.

Kalf. How ?
Turn tail, and scuttle ? No, by Thor,—not I.
Your brother is no swerver.

Hrefna. Kalf, we must !
Do that, and I will be your slave for ever.

Kalf. Thralls we have many,—roses in our garth
But one : the roses please us better.

Hrefna [*kissing his hand*]. Think !
Gudrun and Oswif, Olaf,—all the Dales,—
Will cry on us for snatching Kiartan from them
On the eve of Gudrun's wedding. All will trow
We plot to win him.

Kalf. Let them trow their trows :
An honest man sits firm within his soul :
His conscience is his doom-ring. Other blame
Melts on him like the hail. The choice is Kiartan's :
'Tis he that rides abreast their wordy waves :
Then let him bail the brine he ships : I will not.

Hrefna. Not to please me, Kalf ?

Kalf. No, and it were not ill
If what the golden idol fears came true,
And in the hurtle of war and wash of waves
His love were clean forgot ; for this I say :
Kiartan may one day rue it that he likes

Better the body of Gudrun than the soul
Of Hrefna.

Hrefna. Me, Kalf? Why should he care for me?

Kalf. Because the foolish caring breeds the evil hap,
The wise the good one: that he'll find too late.

Hrefna. O Kalf, meseems you are never fair to Gudrun!

Kalf. That is a winsome piece of woman, but,
Being crossed, belike a woesome. . . . Here they come.

Enter a crowd of guests, with Kiartan shouldered as hero, amid a great shouting.

The Crowd. Bring forth the Bragi-cup! Hurrah! Hurrah!

Snorri. Here's to the hero's health.

The Bragi-cup is drunk.

The Crowd. A speech! A speech!

Kiartan. No Skald am I; yet hearken, all ye lads.
It likes you that my muscles have a grip.
No praise to me: my father wrought them so.
He sailed across the main to Dublin town;
He found his mother's sire the King Myrkiartan;
He fought, he conquered, gat him wealth and honour,
And, as my grandsire Hoskuld did before him,
He won a kingly pledge to deck his bride:
Thus brewed my Bragi-cup of wealth and fame.
Foam of the waves was in it, and the gale
Sang through his blood to mine. So, lads, we too
Will pass the mead-cup down the board of Time.
No laggard life! Would ye deserve a bride,
A head of Iceland gold, an eider breast,—
Like sunlight over Snow-fell,—would ye win
A ripple of laughter, a steadfast tide of love
Setting toward the haven of Gimli's Hall,—
A bride, a Gudrun—(nay, by Thor, her like

Is not to win)—then up, and sail the sea !
No laggard life, I say ; but breed ye sons
To make old Iceland's name ring down the world.
Yea : as for me,—by the hammer of Thor I swear
To win a sword, a king's gift like my father's,
And for my bride a token ere we wed,—
Some splendour from the coffers of a king,—
To make her proudest of the brides of Iceland :
That, by the ring of Odin,—that I swear,—
That is the rede for me !

A murmur of surprise, swelling into a loud shout of applause.

Gudrun. Kiartan !
Olaf. What's this ?
Oswif. Humph !
Kiartan. Speak with Bolli, father :
He goes with us and will explain our plans.
I will have speech with Gudrun.
[*To Gudrun.*] Dear love, pardon !
A sad year flown is but a night of dreams ;
A sad year looming seems eternal woe :
Therefore I told you not. But now we sail—
Gudrun. O Kiartan ! Now ?
Kiartan. To-night. No weeping, lass :
Speed me with smiles : it is for you I go,—
Lest folk should say the stateliest maid in Iceland
Mates with a mere landlubber.
Gudrun. Kiartan, stay !
You'll kill me !
Kiartan. 'Sooth, I will be worthy of you.
The year will pass in a curlew flight of dreams,
All fluttering onward to our wedding day.

Gudrun. No, but a dream of death ! Your Viking hordes !
Wolves of the sea—red eyes—jaws dropping blood,—
They grapple ship and fight ! The blinding bow-hail !
The oaths, the groans of dying men,—O Kiartan !
The clash of blades, the roar of battle,—Kiartan !
The black waves' swirl and gurgle ! Men drop over,
Thrust on the spear point ! You will cry for mercy :
Dream of the Dales and Gudrun : none ! They curse you :
" Clear out the ship," they yell : no quarter ! None !
Up sails and on,—blood in the wake ! They laugh,—
They dab the dead white faces with their oars :
My Kiartan's ! Oh ! You shall not go ! No ! No !

Kiartan. Hold, lass ! What evil tongue has taught you this ?
Some lying skipper flushed with autumn ale,
Fain of the tingling terror in your cheeks ?
Olaf and Hoskuld dared the ills ye dread,
And came back scatheless. No stout son of Iceland
But tempers the ruddy iron of his soul
Upon the ringing anvils of the main.
Shall I alone bide languid by the ingle ?
Nay, that would shame you, Gudrun. Curb your fears ;
Brood not on bogies : I am going, lass.

Gudrun. Then Gudrun shall go with you.

Kiartan. Go with me ?
A maid among the Baresarks ? No, by Thor !
Mind you the distaff.—Mother Thordis, come !
Comfort your daughter.—Friends, I go to graft
Upon the high-seat pillars of our hall,
My hall and hers, the red flower warlike fame.
To Norway first ! and those who stay at home
We'll not forget while they remember us :
And pray the Gods may all be here, and hale,
To greet us in a year.

The Guests. Hurrah ! Hurrah !

Kiartan. Bolli, and Kalf, the sports are over : come !
There's mickle work to do. First to the ship,—
Then back to Herdholt,—and farewell !

He kisses Gudrun's brow : she clasps his neck imploringly. Exit Kiartan with the guests. Gudrun remains weeping : with Liot in the background.

Liot [*chanting to his harp*].

Now is the playmead noiseless ;
Envy blows at her embers,—
Burns at the base of the bride-hall,
Dimming the eyes of Dawn ;
Glides to his snake-lair, gloating,
Fafnir, and broods on his vengeance ;
Sigurd sails with his Shadow :
The broth of the Norns will brew.

Gudrun [*who has ceased her sobbing to listen, and now springs up and accosts him impetuously*].

Old Skald, you are wise. Help me to save my Kiartan.

Liot. Draw from the well of Dawn, and let him drink.

Gudrun. Hrefna is called " The Dawn " : I loathe the word.

Liot. The fateful Norns sit spinning, and the thread
Unravels from within us.

Gudrun. Speak no riddles.
Kiartan woos peril ; my wooing is undone :
My heart forebodes that this will be his doom.

Liot [*singing*].

Brine-field swept by the blast,
Hold your sailor in haven ;
Deep is the well of the Dawn,—
Balm it shall bear to your bosom.

Gudrun. Hold him in haven ? Yes : I must ! I will !

Liot [*singing*].

Bournes of the sea, what boot they ?
Calm shall come of the captain ;
Love shall keep ye to leeward :
The sea we sail on is soul.

Gudrun. Oh, pshaw !
Your words will come to blows, they quarrel so !
" Hold him in haven," first you say ; and then :
" What boots the haven ? " As for love : what is it ?
My life ; his pastime. Love will never hold him.
Now be you Gefion's henchman, friend of maids,
Forestaller of the fates. Persuade him ! Come !
Liot, you shall ! you must !

Liot [*singing*].

Two loves ken I : the earth flame,
Proud, and hungry of praises :
Crossed, it shall scorch and consume you,
Scattering sparks on the wind.
Love ! O the fair love, the sky flame !
It melts thy soul till it mingles,
And blends with the spirit beloved.
So dews from the ocean distil,
Flowers are born of their falling,
And saffron dawns and the sunset ;
For love is grand in the losing,
And glories most in the gift.

Gudrun. Still harping on the Dawn ? I grow aweary !
Songs will not blunt the sword or calm the tempest.

Liot [*singing*].

Not of the ocean's undoing
Beware, nor of weapons of Vikings :
The blast and the blade is within you :
The sea we sail on is soul.

Gudrun. Kiartan will heed your counsel. Come, persuade him.

Enter Hrefna.

Liot. His rede will go the road it set upon.
Flout not the Dawn.

Hrefna. Dear Gudrun, can I help you?
All that I am and have is for your comfort.

Gudrun ignores her.

Liot [*singing*].

A song came soft from the Sun-dawn,—
The song of the years of my seeking:
Drops from the boughs of Ygdrasil
Fell like the notes of a viol.
Balder lived, and his bride came,
Singing the song of the secret,—
The love of the fathomless Beauty,
The song of the solving of souls.

Hrefna. Dear Gudrun, do you hear me? Can I help you?

Gudrun [*rising majestically and tearing the chaplet from her brow*].
May Loki and the Three of Jotunheim
Brand you with flowers of living flame, to mock
These weeds you mock me with!

Hrefna. Gudrun! The curse!

Exit terrified. Liot rises and feels after her in the air.

Gudrun [*imperiously*]. Go with me! I command you: go to Kiartan!

Liot. The song! The singing girl. Come, follow! follow!

ACT II

THREE YEARS LATER

In front of the Temple of Thor at Holyfell, the seat of Snorri the Priest. Two great images of Thor and Odin. Broadfirth and the foreshore in view. Feast time: a gathering of the liegemen of Snorri and of Olaf and Oswif, men of the Dales, and their womenfolk: Olaf, Thorgerd, and their sons Halldor and Steinthor; Oswif, Thordis, and their sons Uspak and Helgi; Snorri; Thorod Scatcatcher, his friend; a Thrall; a Skipper from Norway, and others.

Snorri. When did you spy the ship, and where? Speak, thrall.
Folk say you have deceived us.
Thrall. No, my lord:
At dawn I watched it rounding Buland's Head.
Olaf. Belike, it beaches not at Thorness Haven,
But makes for Daymealness. Wot you past doubt
The ship was Kiartan's?
Thrall. 'Twas the ship he sailed in
Three years ago, from Burgfirth—for the prow
Bore the same figurehead.
Olaf. That's passing strange.
My son well knows the honour due to Thor:

No gaping mouth from any keel of his
Would mock the sprites that guard the home of gods.

Halldor. There's mickle talk of Tryggvason, the king,
Twisting all folk to take a brand-new faith.

Olaf. Hoots, man! That's not for Kiartan: he is rock,—
Firm for the faith of Thor and Frey and Odin.

Thorgerd. Look yonder, husband! What has Gudrun seen?
Gold hair agush, the sunlight on her face,
Downhill she trips, with feet as light as Freya's,
Singing, "The twilight of the gods is past."
Come, meet her.

Exeunt Thorgerd and Olaf.

Steinthor. Ho, thou Skipper out of Norway:
What is this Faith they clack of?

Skipper. Thor no longer.
They sign a cross, and eat the flesh of gods,
And sprinkle folk with water.

Helgi. An their gods
Spare us the sprinkling while the hay is mown,
I'm for the cross, and let Thor's hammer rust!
The gods are gluttons of our gifts, I say:
They sit aloft with goggle eyes, and grin,
And give back shells for shillings.

Halldor. What of Snorri?
We sprinkle him with Temple dues enow;
But let the new Faith come, the Priest goes fishing!
They'll try no fall with Snorri.

The Skipper. Aye, but they will:
The King of Norway backs them.

Helgi. Wait for Snorri.
Who ever found him tumbled in a ditch?
He'll writhe, he'll wriggle: come again, and lo
He basks in sunlight on a bank of flowers.

Halldor. Oho, the snake! you mind what Kiartan said?
Helgi. Mark me, I say no word against the priest:
He is our very good friend.
Steinthor. And ours no less.—
What will he do then, think you, if the Faith
Come, as they cackle?
Helgi. Snorri makes his bargain.
Halldor. That's if he can. But now, it seems to me,
When Kiartan is home again and wed with Gudrun
Your sire and mine will take the helm together
And have chief word in all things.
Helgi. Wait for Snorri.

Enter Gudrun breathless, Olaf and Thorgerd behind her.

Gudrun. The thrall spake true: from yonder knoll I saw it,—
I saw the ship ashore in Holy Creek,
I saw the figurehead, I saw the flag!
Oh! Mother—Father—kiss me! Kiartan comes!
I threw a kiss, and Kiartan—Kiartan caught it!
An hundred folk all dight with warlike gear
March on the foreshore round the Ness, and one
Clad in red kirtle leads the van, and bears
A banner: that is Kiartan. Two behind him,
Kalf Asgeirson and Bolli, march abreast.
Give me the sword Footbiter! O my father,
Here, at the foot of Odin's pedestal,
My hero shall receive it from my hands. . . .
Hark!
Hymn in the distance.

Vexilla Regis prodeunt,
Fulget crucis mysterium,
Quo carne carnis conditor
Suspensus est patibulo.

Quo vulneratus insuper
Mucrone——

Alarmed by the unwonted strains, the men draw their swords; the women and Thorod Scatcatcher fly for refuge to the Temple; Gudrun alone remains with the men. Enter, after a pause, the Monks Gizur and Hialti, with crew and thralls from the ship; many carrying rich shields, war gear, crosses, and religious apparatus; at their head Bolli in a red kirtle, with the Banner of the Cross. Seeing the drawn swords of the Icelanders, Bolli immediately casts his on the ground; and on both sides the example is followed. At a sign from Gizur the hymn ceases, and Bolli, yielding the banner to a bystander, steps forward and embraces Olaf.

Bolli. Hail, foster-father!

Olaf. Bolli, my son!

Gudrun. Oh, where is Kiartan? Speak! He is dead!

Bolli. He is well,—
Kiartan is well.

Gudrun. Where is he?

Bolli. Not with us.
The King of Norway keeps him.

Gizur [*prompting him aside*]. Say "The Princess."

They sign to one another.

Bolli [*to Gudrun*]. Your pardon: be at ease; Kiartan is well.

Gizur and Bolli withdraw, and speak by the image of Thor; Gudrun converses eagerly and anxiously with the Dalesfolk; Hialti marshals the crew.

Gizur. My son, say not the King holds Kiartan hostage.

Bolli. I shall not say the Princess loves him.

Gizur. Listen:

The King said " Bluff not Iceland : coax and lead it,
Speaking of Kiartan as my friend, not captive."
Iceland's a bull-whale taken in the snout,
A gannet when the net is spread with care :
" Hostage " sounds ill ; the word makes war on friendship.
A time may come for threats : it is not now.
But here's the tale of Kiartan and the Princess
Ready to hand, most flattering to your folk,—
Ha, ha ! And true as *credo*.
Bolli. Lies !
Gizur. Well, well :
When tales go to thy tally, why destroy them ?—
Besides, your Gudrun is fair : you love her.
Bolli. Ah !
How know you that ?
Gizur. I read two languages :
Latin and—love-looks.
Bolli. Kiartan is my friend,—
More than my brother,—and betrothed to Gudrun :
Gizur. Little he'll care ; and she is—well, a woman.
Bolli. We wrestle fair in Iceland.
Gizur. What—in love ?
A pause : Bolli is silent.
You vowed to aid the Faith, and Kiartan vowed it.
I pray you weigh the Cross against a scruple.
Bolli. Thrice Kiartan saved my life.
Gizur. And Christ your soul.
Bolli. When we were lads——
Gizur. Sow not to reap the past.
The future is yours,—and Gudrun's.
Bolli. Tempt me not.
Bolli betrays not Kiartan.
Gizur. This do at least :

Conceal the cause that keeps the lad from Iceland,
While we conceal the love the Princess bears him.

Bolli. To that I agree. . . .

Gizur. There's one behind the pillar !
Come !

They mingle with the crowd. The Icelanders eagerly examine the treasures of the Christians. Thorod Scatcatcher creeps out of concealment behind Thor's image, and touches Snorri on the shoulder. They go aside.

Snorri. Eh ? Where have you been ?

Thorod. In hiding, master :
Liked not their looks. No danger now ? Eh, master ?

Snorri. Dastard !

Thorod. Hiding, I found a pretty egg.
Say, shall we hatch it ?

Snorri. Not the time for riddles !

Thorod. Bolli and Kiartan take the Christian faith,
And so must all in Iceland, says the King.
Kiartan is held as hostage. Whoop, my master !
A canny sport ! The princess tickles him
To love her.

Snorri. Ha ! And he ?

Thorod. That's dark. Belike
He cleaves to Gudrun. So thinks Bolli ; but,
Says Gizur, " Here's your chance, young Bolli."

Snorri. Ha !
And he will take it ?

Thorod. No. And why not, master ?
Think you he fears they'll nip him 'neath their thumbs ?

Snorri. That, or a scruple. Belike the shavelings wish it.
He is their staff, and climbers like a grip.

Thorod. He must not have these scruples, must he, master ?

Snorri. Tell on.

Thorod. He loves the wench.

Snorri. That is no news.

Think you I have the day to waste on tattle?

Thorod. "Tattle!" Are these the thanks I get? Why master,

Here is the egg we've looked for, three years past.

Now can we hatch an earthquake in the Dales.

Whoop, master! Olaf, Oswif, Kiartan, Bolli—

Dusk of the gods of Saelingsdale and Herdholt,

Boon friends they must not be, now must they, master?

Nay, they shall fight like puffin-cocks. Then, whoop!

Up goes the star of Snorri, down goes Olaf.—

Shall Thorod teach his master?

Snorri. Teach the trolls.

Tell on.

Thorod. This way. I love the Temple shades.

Exeunt into the Temple.

Hialti [*addressing the throng*].

Men of old Iceland, blest among the isles,—

For here, before our fathers fled the war,

The Dove of Peace had lit,—to you, my kindred,

Tryggvason, King of Norway, greeting sends,

Holding your friendship dear; and bids you take

A gift above all gifts,—not this poor shield,

Enchased with gold and ivory, though in sooth

This also is yours [*murmurs of approval*],—but water blest of Heaven,

Whose sprinkling wards the faithful from the trolls,

From evil eyes and pestilence, and hags,

Whereby your land is ridden,—most of all

From trolls and elves that haunt the hearts of men,

And run and writhe within you, tug your troth,

Stiffen the lip of pride, and twist the sneer,
Pull down the mouth in dudgeon and disdain,
Make eyes that lour and lure, and venomous tongues,
Lips white with wrath, and teeth on edge with anger ;
The pillars of the peaceful home they sap,
Clang-to the door upon the ill-clad guest,
Stir up the feud of kin, and stain the board
With blood of hate, not wine of fellowship :—
Trolls, fetches, sprites are these of lust and pride,
Pride of the purse and vanity of power,
Rankling of envy, spite, revenge, and malice :
All which the holy water exorcises,
When faith goes with the taking : try ! Come, try !

Voices of the Throng. Me, master !—Me !—My cow's bewitched—My thrall has the blue sickness.—Give it to me.—No, me ! My mother-in-law has the evil eye.—Me ! Me ! A gaberlunzie man has cast the eye of glamour on my girl.—No, me !—Me ! First !

Hialti. But all must trow the faith of Christ, and swear
Upon this cross——

Olaf. Ho, treason ! Out, ye varlets !

The throng shrinks back afraid.

We swear upon the mallet-sign of Thor.
Traitors will deal with Olaf. Where is Snorri ?

Enter Snorri, from out of the Temple, with Thorod Scatcatcher.

Snorri. I bow to Olaf.

Olaf. Nay, Priest : this is for you ;
But as for me, I say, lend them your ear,
But toss them not your soul.

Hialti. I ask no more.
We came in peace to bring the cross of peace.
For now Redemption cometh—now the world

Shakes off the sable robes of death and doom,
To wear the snow-white garments of the Church.
And how shall these things be? Behold the Cross!

Holds up a richly wrought crucifix. The throng crowds round and admires it.

Snorri [*aside to Gizur*]. This way, my friend! I like your faith enough;
And it may hap I help you. Ah, you know me?
Yea, we are Snorri, the priest. We take the dues.
More of that afterwards. But now one word
Concerning Kiartan. Pray confide in me—

Exeunt into the Temple.

Hialti [*to the throng*].
Grew from the floor and fount of things a tree,
Ygdrasil, rooted deep in Time and Space:
Its sap is life, but thereon hung a fruit
Whose juices raging in the blood and brain
Bring feuds and envy, pride and evil lusts:
Thereof our primal parents ate and fell,—
And still the poison gallops in your veins:—
For Reptile Nidhug tempted them and swore
To wash us drunk with venom of our vice
Down to the pit of Nidheim. Woe! ah woe!
What power shall save us? Odin, so ye tell,
Hung on the tree for many days, and offered
Himself to himself: but what good gat ye thence?
Envy and feuds still flourish; king and franklin
Snatch at their neighbours' lands, and black revenge
Boils in the stream of blood from sire to son.
No peace! No light in darkness! Who redeems us?
What blood-wite shall atone for all your scores?
Kin, I will tell you. Out of Mary's womb,
In the land of the rising sun, by Micklegarth,

Sprang the sweet fruit whereof the faithful eat:
Flesh and the blood of God made man for us:
Grafted upon Ygdrasil, tree of life;—
Yea, as we graft sweet apples on the sour,
Man on the Beast, and God on Man were grafted,
When Mary's son was nailed upon the tree.
Behold him on the shield! He poured his blood,
Pierced with the god-nails, that the envenomed veins
Wrought to all lust and ravine might be healed,
And war and envy cease, and all men eat
Their bread in love and fellowship and peace.

They gather round the shield again: he shows them crosses, pictures, etc. Meanwhile Snorri has been bargaining aside with Gizur for thralls carried by the ship.

Gizur [*to Snorri*]. This one is fairest spoken, being by birth
No slave. At Thrandheim Point he came aboard
Pursued, and gat our help at price of thralldom.
Ten crowns will buy him.

Snorri. Done!

Hands money. Then to the slave:

And now, my man,
Like ye your freedom?

Thrall. Aye, my lord.

Snorri. Then buy it.

Thrall. Alack, I have no silver.

Snorri. Speech is silver.
The wise tongue buys its freedom with a tale.
Listen! *They go aside.*

Hialti [*to the throng*].
This is the holy water, this the Dew
Fallen from Ygdrasil's branches when the Christ
Hung on the tree: and he who takes it, dies not.

He invites the crowd, but, fearing Olaf's authority, they hang back.

A Bystander. What say you, Olaf ?

Olaf. Wholesome rede is that
Of sinking pride and blood-feuds : though belike
Justice is daughter of indignant wrath
As Worth is son of dignity and pride ;
But here methinks those sires have gat a squint,
And borne an ugly offspring. Let that be.
Says Liot all are kin, all equal born,
And wrong to one is wrong to all the world.
A wise word that : and these folk say the like.
Hear them. But nought in haste ! Ye have my rede.

Hialti. For evening waits the idler's suit, ye say,—
And hell for those who tarry. But, to our theme !
Cease from revenge. Wrong is not cured by wrong.
Like lusty fowls ye men strut forth to fight,
And as the cock crows o'er his vanquished foe
Ye sing defiant skald-songs ; but the Norns
Spin, spin, and sing—hard twisted songs of fate,
And brew, of the bitter blood ye shed, your bane.
For sour blood breeds the sour, and sweet the sweet,
As corn grows corn, and thorn bears only thorn.
So, with the bitter blood of Odin, ye
Mark board and altar and your breasts : but I
Mark you with blood outpoured by Him who gave
Not good for good and ill for ill, but good
For evil : cheating so the Norns and brewing
Sweet blood to kill the sour ; and sing the song
That melts all janglings into harmony ;
And as some purer light than ours may pierce
Flesh, so that song of utmost Love goes beating
Up at the bars of Time and Space, and throbs

To eternity, our souls upon its wings.

Olaf. Peace unto men-folk is no easy rede.
The man speaks wisely. But beware of haste:
Not lightly folk should change their fathers' faith.

Enter Snorri and Gizur, smiling in amicable understanding.

A Bystander. Aye! Aye! And when the scurvy South-land folk
Took well the outlandish faith, full well they rued it.
For lo, a rumbling underground, a roar
Of bellows, and the earth belched forth in flames!
Thor at his stithy, mark ye; and their hay
Was swallowed by his vengeance.

Snorri. Tut, good fellow!
Did never the hills smoke till the new Faith came?

The Bystander. Let sleeping dogs lie sleeping, so say I.

The Skipper. Trow ye that Thor, denied, will wreck your crops?
When Tunsberg folk denied the Christ, the King
Burnt in their barns—not hay, but heathens!

Olaf. Ha!

Gizur [*to Bolli*]. Mark ye the evil that I feared? Yon chieftain [*pointing to Olaf*]
Rears like a swancock threatened.
[*To the Throng.*] So the King
Did to his enemies, not to you, his friends.

Olaf. Hey, but yon fluty fellow said your God
Would have us fair to friend and foe alike.

The Skipper. When Eyvind asked the King to sacrifice
On the altar of Thor, the King laughed loud and said,
"Catch me an ass, and I will sacrifice it":
Whereon his men seized Eyvind, and the King
Slaughtered him in the God-home.

Olaf. Ha!

The Skipper. And when
Jarl Raud refused the Christian faith, the King
Bade strap him on a board, and gagged his jaw,
And thrust along his throat a hollow reed,
And with a burning coal forced ling-worms down it,
Which ate their way out through him; so the King
Slew Raud who would not take the Christian faith.

Olaf. Out with the knaves! We'll none of them I say;
Nor of their damnèd faith, their lies and murders!

Hialti. Kindred—

Olaf. Begone!

Bolli. Good foster-father——

Olaf. You,—
Are you also a traitor to your father's faith?

Bolli. No traitor, but a truster of the Christ;
And not from dread or durance; but even so
It came about, that, when in Thrandheim fiord,
We men of Iceland planned to kill the king,
And were convicted, being condemned to death,
Life, like a flood of sunlight in a dungeon
When first the door is flung, streamed in upon us,
And on the flood the knowledge of the Faith:—
The king we wronged had ransomed us; and gladly
From him we took the ransom of the Cross:
And, would that all did likewise.

Olaf. Now, by Thor,
The sign o' the cross is symbol of cross purpose;
Or here's a king of contrasts.

Hialti. Tides of sin
Wash in the soul, but Faith shall fight the flood.

Olaf. When many voices war the song is slain,
And none shall know the tune. But more anon.

Gizur and Hialti talk with Snorri. Olaf turns from the throng to Bolli.

My lad, I take it ill ye say no word
Of Kiartan.

Snorri joins the group, listening respectfully.

Bolli. Ask me not: my lips are sealed.

Olaf. Here's Gudrun with her blue eyes drenched in tears:
Comfort the lass, I pray you.

Bolli. He is well.

Thorgerd. There, child, you hear: all's well.—It cut her soul
That Kiartan left so lightly, and now she says
He never truly loved her: but I say
That was to spare her pain. The lad is faithful:
Assure her, Bolli.

Bolli. That is Kiartan's nature.

Gudrun. Hear him! He shirks it. Oh, they treat me well!
Three years and never a word. Some men, belike,
Can wag their heads and mock, with necks in hiding.
Great is the house of Oswif, O my kindred,
That can afford to take such scorn so lightly.

She looks at her brothers: then turns sharply to Bolli:

Confess: he loves another.

Bolli. Think it not.

Gudrun. If you and he had tails, you'd stand like mules
Swishing the flies each from the other's nozzle.
Be sure I like you for it! Tell me then:
Why does he send no word, no pledge, no token?

Bolli hesitates.

Snorri. Well, by my troth, good Olaf, if a friend
May speak without offence,—good Bolli errs;
And nobly errs, defending one he loves.
Not that I blame your Kiartan. None should yield

His hand to one while others hold his heart.

Olaf. Ho ! what is this ?

Snorri. Nothing but what ye know.

Olaf. Of Kiartan ? Nought !

Snorri. Then I do wrong to speak.

Olaf. Out with it, man ! I'll not be hoodwinked.

Snorri. Nay !

What should I know ? It is mere talk I wot of.
Ill tides are they that bear a friend ill tidings.
Though some might think alliance with a king
An honour even to Olaf.

Olaf. What is this ?

Snorri. Belike—who knows ?—the tale is false. And yet—
Kiartan's a catch for any——

Gudrun. Oh ! It is true :
He is wedded ! I am lost !

Bolli [*to Snorri*]. Who told you this ?

Gudrun [*to Bolli*]. You guessed—you knew it : that was why you quibbled.

Thordis. He wished to spare you : do not blame him, Gudrun.

Olaf [*to Bolli*]. Speak ! Is this true ?

Bolli. They talk ! They talk !

Snorri. See yonder :
Is that man of your crew ? Any will serve :
The talk is general.

Bolli. A runagate :—
He joined the ship at Thrandheim Mouth for refuge.

Snorri. No, no, my friend, you keep not truth at bay :
It pounces. He is to hand ; we'll ask him. Here, man !
Came you from Nidoyce with the ship ?

The Thrall. Nay, lord.
I ran o'er-land for succour, and they took me.

Thorgerd. Bolli speaks truth, you see.

Snorri. Well, I am wrong.
[*To the Thrall.*] So then you know not Nidoyce?
The Thrall. Aye, my lord.
I ran from Nidoyce.
Snorri. There the Princess dwells.
The Thrall. Aye, thank the lord! The bustle of her feast
Covered my flight.
Snorri. What feast?
The Thrall. Her wedding.
Snorri. Whose?
The Thrall. Lord Kiartan's, with the Princess Ingibiorg.
Consternation—amid which Gudrun is led away.
Bolli [*aside to the Thrall*]. From Nidoyce to the Thrandheim
Mouth,—say, thrall:
How far is that by land?
The Thrall. Full thirty leagues.
Bolli. The firth is less. We sailed it in a day.
You quitted Nidoyce later, and outstripped us?
Thrall, you are swift.
The Thrall. Aye, lord. My legs are long.
Bolli. Liars in Iceland need some length of leg,
Or else their necks grow shorter.
The Thrall. How far is Ere?
Bolli. Nigh the same distance. Will you run it, thrall?
The Thrall. Aye, for a ship lies bound for Orkney, lord:
A great man gives me passage. Touch me not.
I am his franklin—he is sworn my friend. *Exit.*
Bolli [*stands dazed, solus*].
"When tales go to thy tally why destroy them?"
She is more fair than ever!—Christ! But,—Kiartan!
He still continues standing alone, as if bewildered.
Thordis [*at another part of the stage, to Gudrun*].
Weep not, my child. Young blood will heal the wound.

Here's Bolli,—crazy with your eyes' bewitching,—
Yours at a nod, and heir to Olaf's brother.
Now make your father glad by taking him.
Olaf consents.

Gudrun. Oh, mother, let me be!

Thordis. True to his friend, he'll not be false to you.

Gudrun. I hate him.

Thordis. —Saying no word about this Princess,
And Kiartan's carrying on,—and all the while
Mad to bespeak you for himself: how noble!

Gudrun. Bolli is not for me.

Thordis. A maid with sense
Would live on groats a twelvemonth, not to lose
A love like Bolli.

Gudrun. I think no more of love.

Thordis. Mercy! And what will wenches come to next!

Gudrun. Say: shall a daughter of the house of Kiallak
Forget a wrong like this?

Thordis. Ah, to be sure,
Your head was always high. But let that be.
Revenge is meet for men-folk, not for maidens.

Gudrun [*suddenly, as if illuminated*].
True! That is true! A man! And one that loves me.

Bolli crosses the stage, and fronts Gudrun shyly; Thordis leaves them together.

Bolli. Gudrun?

Gudrun [*softly*]. What want you? Have I not heard enough?

Bolli [*finding voice, and speaking vehemently*].
To die! To break my life, my years, my fortune,
All that I am and shall be, at your feet.
Gudrun, I love you! I love you! I ever loved you!
Let me be near you, comfort, help you; or—

Live, Oh, I cannot !

Gudrun. Truly, I think you love me.
It is a mad world, Bolli.

Bolli. Hear me, Gudrun !
All day I'd sing you skald-songs, hold your rock,
Harp to you, win you riches, robes, and jewels,
Sit at your feet, or plait your golden hair,
Wrestle or run or dance to make you happy,
Be as a king to all the world, to you
A bond-slave,—might I only live for you,
Not die because you scorn me.

Gudrun. A mad world, Bolli !
When Kiartan wooed he spoke not half so fair ;
So well you love ! So faithful in your love !
So faithless he ! Yes,—you deserve right well :
Yet all you say I would have done for him
Sooner than trouble to thank you for the like :
But then you see I hate you.

Bolli. Hate me then :
But give me leave to love you.

Gudrun. You might do more.

Bolli. What ?

Gudrun. Wed me.

Bolli. Gudrun !

Gudrun. It is a mad world, Bolli.

Bolli. Mad ? Aye it rocks, it dances ! All the grass
Sings and the birds are clapping wings like hands ;
The waves are laughing children, and their foam
Locks flung in revel ; and I am king o' the feast !
What are they doing yonder ? Moulting Faiths ?
Fools ! all their gods are puppets, all their creeds
Rags ; but the god that sits among the stars
Is Love ! For him the sun glows, and the flowers

Flame, and the white clouds frolic with the moon.

Gudrun. Dear, you will try to win me.

Bolli [*seizing her rapturously*]. That word again!

Gudrun. Not now! No! Loose me! I hate you.

Bolli. Say it! You shall!
" Dear! " Pout your lips upon that word.

Gudrun. Not now:
Some day—perhaps.

Bolli. When? Oh, I will take Life
And crush its essence in my hands to wring
That drop again!

Gudrun. There is another way.

Bolli. What? How?

Gudrun. No matter. . . . We shall see.

Thordis approaches: Gudrun beckons her.
Dear mother,
Bolli and I have settled it. He weds me.

Thordis. Olaf and Thorgerd, Oswif, Snorri,—listen!
Here be strange tidings!

Snorri and the Dale folk gather round.
Gudrun marries Bolli!

They all withdraw talking.

Liot [*with his harp*].

O white strong temple of wisdom,
Brow of the beautiful Balder,
The bane-weed smote thee to bleeding;—
Flung thee in torrents of Niflheim
The lord of the vengeful,—Loki.
Sinking, rising, I saw thee,
A white flower drenched in a whirlpool,
A star in the wrack of a storm.

Snorri quits the group of the Dale folk and joins Gizur and Hialti.

Snorri. How fares the preaching?

Gizur. Thanks to yon chieftain, ill.

Hialti. Alack, they marvel at the gold upon the shields
More than the good news of the God of Peace.

Gizur. Some say that folk who wrought such princely gear
May wot of things unknown to simple folk;
Therefore they take it well: but this they trow:
Thor of the golden head that sits up yonder
Pointing to the idol.
Looks on askance, and has an evil deeming.

Snorri. There is a cure for that: a word with you!
They whisper.

Liot [*with his harp, singing*].

Fastest of friends and of lovers,
Balder the bright and the brave,
Oh, that a weed should undo thee,
When all the blossoms were thine!
Rend the suckers, destroy them,
Oh, willow and wonder of women!—
Poison lurks in the pride-weed,
Cause of the weeping of gods!

Snorri [*audibly*]. As to the Temple dues?

Gizur. Yours, as before.

Snorri. Iceland being christened, Kiartan is released?

Gizur. We vow it.

Snorri. Both for his kindred's sake and yours
Utter no word of his captivity.

Gizur. All things we promise for the King and Church.

Snorri. And I as Priest, for Iceland, vow to take
The Faith of Christ and let the land be christened.

Gizur. Speedily?

Snorri. At the wedding feast of Bolli.

Gizur. Snorri is father of the Faith in Iceland.

Snorri. I take no praise : this favour only I ask—
My share in this is now and for ever secret.
Hialti. Said nobly.
Gizur. Sir, I understand : and promise.
Snorri. Now win the folk, and luck be with you, friends.
Gizur [*walks to the knoll fronting the image of Thor, then turns to the throng, and addresses them loudly*].
Forasmuch as some of you have dread of Thor,
Fearing a visitation on the land,
Now hearken, Iceland ! If your gods be true,
Here let them strike me dead, and all ye folk
Cleave to the ancient faith. [*Turning to the idol.*] Come down, old Thor !
Thou of the slouch hat and the squint eye—Strike !

A pause.

Ho ! sit'st thou there to hear us mock and flout thee ?
Strike if thou canst ! Down with thy hammer, Dog :
Make mountains flame and thunder rock the welkin.

Another pause.

What ! Art thou mum ? Old tramp, old mallet-paw,
Shall then a Babe of Bethlehem master thee,—
Gather thy thunders in his little fist,
And hold thy hounds in leash, to lick his palm ?

Pause.

So ! will ye skulk, ye mongrel sons of Odin ?
Stir, wake and strike, old fox, old wolf o' the sea ?

Draws near the image.

I twig thee by the nose,—I spit upon thee.
Hast thou no grit, no rage, no wrath, no ruin ?
Thou block, thou bane of flies, thou worm-house !
Belly of rats and toads, spew forth thy vermin !
In the name of Christ I bid thee rock and tumble.

Strikes at the idol : it totters to the earth ; all manner of vermin crawl out. The people, hitherto showing signs of fear, now shout and laugh.

The Throng. Hail to the Christ ! Down, down with Frey and Odin !

Snorri [*aside to Thorod*]. What think ye of that, old pirate ?

Thorod. Whoop, my master !
None like the priest for hatching eggs in season !
That was well thought of,—bidding break the image.
Dusk o' the Dale-gods ! Olaf's star shall set :
The king is ours ; the folk will turn against him ;
There will be games when Kiartan comes again,
After the wedding ;—after, it shall be ;
And when the tale is told, what man shall know
Who found the egg and hatched it ? Whoop, my master !

ACT III

SCENE.—*Herdholt, the seat of Olaf Hoskuldson: the Guest Hall. The wainscotting is painted with legendary pictures, and the words of Ulf Aggason's poem thereon. Tapestries screen the fire-hall in the rear. Benches to right and left, and a central high-seat with pillars and a canopy on both. That on the right is elevated above the other, and of a more imposing structure. In the middle of the hall is a swearing-stone. Olaf sits with a drinking-horn before him; Thorgerd, his wife, beside him.*

Thorgerd. Now they are wedded, and the feast is over,
Tell me, Olaf, what thought ye of Bolli?
Olaf. Freakish;
His humours passed my fathoming.
Thorgerd. And mine.
Did ye not note those glooms and cloudy ways;
And how he snatched his joy in savage bursts,—
A baresark mood unlike his boyish wont:
Strange in a man about to wed!
Olaf. Aye! Aye!
Thorgerd. And such a bride! I call it quite uncanny!
Poor man! And how he ate her with his eyes,—
Just as of old,—and she a lump of ice!
Olaf. The ends of her mouth curl downward now, I notice.

Thorgerd. Well, well: he has the wife he pined for.
Olaf. True.
Thorgerd. These Christian weddings little suit my taste.
They'll bring the bride no luck.
Olaf. Nor us, I'm thinking.
Thorgerd. Our hands are clean. We had no part in it.
Olaf. That is all grist to Snorri's mill.
Thorgerd. In sooth.
'Tis easily seen he sets the folk against us.
Olaf. For or against, their Faith is not for me.
Thorgerd. That cow we'll get no milk from.
Olaf. No, by Thor!
Times are much changed of late.
Thorgerd. Last night I dreamed
Kiartan came back; and on his brow was grown
A golden cross, a marvel unto men,—
To him a burning flame. Then came a wench,
Comely to look upon, and with her lips
Gently, to ease him, kissed the cross away;
And afterwards we saw him not, and some
Said he was child again in other lands,
And gladsome; but the girl remained, and took
An anguish, and a burning on her lips,
And slowly died, fair spoken unto all,
And very sweet and stately to the last:
Then the ewes bleating in the garth awoke me:
I thought, There's Kiartan laughing in his cradle.—
Good bairn he was!
Olaf. You always dream of Kiartan.
That comes of frets, and eating nought by day,
To make it up o' nights.
Thorgerd. When Skuld, the Norn,
Goes nightly on her errand past our porch,

Carrying the Future upon a skein, she flings
A shadow, and we dream of things to come.
—My star! who's standing in the doorway yonder?
How like the maid I dreamt of!

Olaf. Enter, child!

Hrefna enters.

Thorgerd. Who is it? Clad so wildly,—all her hair
Blown, and her bosom panting as with speed?

Hrefna. The wedding feast——?

Thorgerd. Is over.

Hrefna. Over?

Thorgerd. Aye!
Last night.

Olaf. By Thor! 'Tis Hrefna!

Thorgerd. Mercy, child!
How came you here! We heard you were at Burgfirth.

Hrefna. Gudrun is wedded! Oh, too late, too late!
They said the feast was held to-day.

Thorgerd. The monks
Bade fast to-day, and so 'twas held on Thursday.

Hrefna. Kiartan sailed into Burgfirth yesternight,
Not wedded to the Princess! All the rest
Believed that tale; not I:—for was not Kiartan
Fibre of faithfulness, and mighty in love,
Toward Gudrun?

Olaf. Loki blinds us. So we drive
Headlong on hidden rocks, and Kiartan's life
Is shipwrecked.

Thorgerd. Child! And have you ridden all night?

Hrefna. Yes,—and too late!

Thorgerd. Alone?

Hrefna. Ah, but poor Kiartan!

Thorgerd. Alone across the fells by night! My star!
Met you no troll-wives?

Hrefna. None. I lost my way.
But found the path again; and afterwards
There were some hoofs behind me.

Thorgerd. It makes me shudder!

Olaf. That was a true Valkyria's ride, by Thor!
The woof that songs are wrought of.

Thorgerd. Thorolf's ghost
Walks much o' nights, and folk are beaten coal-black.
I wonder you escaped. Did you not fear?

Hrefna. Not very much. I stumbled once, remounted,
And rode in pain. But when the moon swam out,—
I laughed and said, " 'Tis only I who am dying;
Kiartan is being saved."

Olaf. A Valkyr truly,
But of the living, not the dead.

Hrefna. —And now
Kiartan will not be saved. O would that I
Had perished! *Cries hysterically.*

Thorgerd. The child is overweary. Come!
Eat, drink, and sleep. All may be for the best.

Exeunt Thorgerd and Hrefna.

Olaf. Riders without! What, ho!

Seizes his sword. Enter several thralls from behind the arras; then from the front of the stage Kiartan and Kalf; with them two men bearing a large trunk.

Kiartan. Not foes, my father.

Olaf, recognising his son, drops his sword and waves a dismissal to the thralls. During the following the bearers of the box carry it down the hall, through the arras; then retire the way they came.

Olaf. Kiartan, my bairn! [*They embrace.*] And Kalf!
Welcome, friend Kalf!

Kiartan. Not welcome I,—if what they tell be true,
That Gudrun weds to-day with Bolli.

Olaf. Son,
We hoped your thoughts had wandered far from her.

Kiartan. Shall Iceland be forgotten of Olaf's son!

Olaf. Not Iceland, Kiartan.

Kiartan. And is not Iceland Gudrun?
The flowers are made of her, the sky, the sea,
The blue hills, and the blush upon the snow;
The mown hay breathes of Gudrun, and the gulls
Call to the wild sea-nesses Gudrun's name.
No, I have not forgotten Gudrun, father! . . .
But tell me, and quickly, since for aught I know
Next moment brings me face to face with Bolli,
Does she then love him, think you?

Olaf. Love or not,
It little boots——

Kiartan. Nay, much; for, if she do,
Not like a sword edge Kiartan cuts the knot,
But lays his blessing on it,—and good-bye
To Iceland! But if Gudrun love him little,
Then, by the rood, I'll have her; yea, in sooth,
Though all the sons of Kiallak from their cairns
Rise up against me; for I take it ill
That Bolli would betray me.

Olaf. No, my son,
Bolli betrays you not; we thought you wedded,
And to a Princess.

Kiartan. Bolli thought it not:
He knew my mind toward her.

Olaf. Others said——

Kiartan. Yes,—others: geese will gabble. The Princess
Was not for me.

Kalf [*to Olaf*]. True: but she might have been,
Had Kiartan willed it.

Kiartan. Bite thy tongue on that!
It is a baseness.

Kalf. Tut, man! it is truth.
[*To Olaf.*] He was the king's boon fellow; and the Princess
Was mad in love with him.

Olaf. Eh, eh, my son?

Kiartan taps impatiently on the board, making no reply.

Kalf. For all her blushing ways and maiden meekness,
She liked it little that Kiartan held to Gudrun.

Olaf [*to Kiartan*]. Now what say you to that?

Kiartan. I say, by the rood,
That Princess was a saint; and Kalf, so be it
He be not less than man, will hold his tongue.

Kalf. Would you have all folk say that you, not she,
'Gan harping to the love tune?

Kiartan. Let them say it.

Kalf. And blame you falsely for a broken troth?
Not I!

Olaf pours out wine.

Kiartan. Peace, Kalf! And father, say: how goes it
'Twixt Bolli and Gudrun?

Olaf [*handing him wine*]. As betwixt folk wedded.

Kiartan. You mean, they love. *He drinks.*

Olaf. I mean—the knot is tied,
That in the severing cuts the quick of kin.

Kiartan. Wedded! [*He tosses the drinking horn down fiercely on the board.*] The feast was fixed for Friday.

Olaf. And held
On Thursday.
Kiartan. Christ !
Olaf. Some shaveling's scruple.
Kiartan. Lies !
Bolli had news I landed.

Enter Thorgerd.

Thorgerd. Oh, my bairn !
They embrace.
[*To Olaf.*] He knows ?
Kiartan. I know.
Thorgerd. Alas, that we should live
To deal this blow, and in the hour of greeting !
Kiartan [*pacing the hall in agitation*].
Ha, Bolli ! Well done, Bolli ! They who stab
Hearts bared to them in love should strike like you,
Slyly and swift for safety : afterwards
There's time to laugh into the open wound !
Now father, mother, comrade, hark to me !
Henceforth, if any man possess a friend,
Held more than brother, catch him by the ear !
Cry Caution ! Foul play is brewing. Bid him fasten
Padlocks upon his barn, grip tight his purse,
Set watch-dogs near his wife,—lest by his friend
He is robbed, betrayed, stripped naked of his joy,
Flung out like flotsam on a reef of woe,—
Fooled ! Juggled !
Olaf. By your leave, my son, I quit you.
Kiartan. To warn your Bolli,—have him safe in byre ;—
Peacemaker Olaf, that's your rede, I reckon.—
Nay, hold ! I will not kill him : men like him
Should live and prosper, that the world may know

He is the fool who trusts ; for traitors thrive,—
While true men tumble. . . .

Olaf. Vow you will not kill him.

Kiartan. The old gods perish, and Bolli slays the new :
There's nothing left to vow by.

Olaf. Aye, my son !
Our love !

Kiartan [*huskily*]. Oh, father !

Olaf. Bairn, I greatly doubt,
For all you say, if Bolli did betray you.

Kiartan. Prove he was true, then are you twice my father,
Making again the man that else were unmade.

Olaf. One, who left Norway after him, declared
He saw you wed in Nidoyce.

Kiartan. Never a ship
Left Thrandheim after Bolli's.

Olaf. The yokel ran
And overtook the ship.

Kiartan. That man had wings—
And silver taught his tongue.

Olaf. If it were Snorri's ?

Kiartan. Ah !

Olaf. True it was, the man was taken aboard
Nigh Thrandheim Mouth ; and if the ship were windbound
Bolli might well believe him.

Kiartan. God in heaven !
Where is that snake ?

Olaf. Softly, my son. Be sure ;
And then——

Kiartan. What then ?

Olaf. Be wary.

Kiartan. Here's cud for chewing.
If Bolli, like the rest, were Snorri's dupe—?

. . . Was Snorri at the feast ?

Olaf. He took the high-seat ;
We being adverse to the outlandish rites :
For mickle change has marred us since you came,
And the old priest and the new ones rule the Dales ;
" Father of the Faith " they call him.

Kiartan. Sooth ! And he
Hastened the wedding ?

Olaf. May be : I meddled not.

Kiartan. Who sent for me ?

Olaf. That I know nought about.

Kiartan. A skipper out of Hunafirth brought word
" The Faith is taken in Iceland ; and a wench
Bids warn Lord Kiartan evil brews at home :
Let him for Gudrun's sake return with speed."

Olaf. 'Twere well, my son, had you not dallied there,
But come with Bolli.

Kiartan. Captives are not choosers.
Save for that word, " The Faith is taken in Iceland,"
Belike I were not here to-day ; for not
Till then the King released me.

Olaf. Captives ?

Kiartan. Say rather, hostage for the Faith.

Olaf. My son a hostage ?
That we knew nought of.

Kiartan. Not from Bolli ?

Olaf. Nought.

Kiartan. Then Gudrun knew not !

Olaf. No, or I'll be bound
She would have waited for you.

Kiartan. Ah, Bolli, Bolli !

Thorgerd [*rocking herself*]. Oh ! Oh !

Olaf. Time is a trusty leech, my son. Take cheer.

Kiartan. Bolli, my little brother: Thou and I
Clomb nesting on the cliffs, raced in the snow,
Trapped foxes, swam together,—thou and I,—
When we were lads; and once Death came, and said,
"Good-morrow!" we being lost among the fells.

Thorgerd. Oh! Oh!

Olaf. I mind me.

Kiartan. Huddled together we sat,
Nor ever thought to see our home again;
The moon was sinking on a world of snow;
Our hands were clasped; I looked into his eyes,—
Clear as a frosty night,—and Truth and Love
Shone in their depths more brightly than the stars.
Death passed us by,—an evil thing to do.

Thorgerd. He carried Bolli on his back three leagues,
And saved his life that night.

Olaf. True, so he did!

Kiartan. "Oh, never the night shall come on us again,
But I shall know those stars are there," I said.

Thorgerd. My bairn! My bairn! Can nothing comfort thee?

Kiartan. Now it is night, and there are no more stars.

Enter Kalf, through the arras; which, being drawn, exposes Hrefna kneeling beside the box, and examining the contents.

Kalf. Lo, here is my sister Hrefna! She it was
Who bribed the skipper over at Hunafirth
To warn us out in Norway against the wedding.

Kiartan. Your Hrefna!

Kalf. Sooth! And now she has come alone
On horse from Burgfirth, riding all the night.
She lost her way, yet wild to stop the wedding
Outrode us. Where's the man could do it?

Thorgerd. Or woman,—
Unless she loved ?
Kiartan. Pray, who does Hrefna love ?
Thorgerd. You, Kiartan.
Kiartan. No, by the rood : she would keep quiet,
Wheedle and cozen and traitorously lie,
Scrabble for happiness herself, and to hell
With the rival ! 'Tis the way of love.
Thorgerd. Not Hrefna's.
Olaf. The night is dark, my son ; yet stars are shining.
Kalf [*calling to Hrefna, who, unaware that the arras is drawn, stands at a mirror and tries on a coif richly woven with gold, which she has taken out of the box*].
Hands off ! That's not for you, nor me : 'tis Kiartan's.
Thorgerd. All gold ! My star ! Was ever a coif so fine !
Kalf. The Princess gave it for his bride to wear.
Hrefna [*looking round shyly and embarrassed, as she removes it from her head and is about to replace it in the box*].
For Gudrun ? . . . Oh !
Kiartan [*loudly*]. Who says it is not Hrefna's ?
Right comely does it sit upon her brow,
Like constancy and courage in her soul.
She trusted, she forsook me not,—and she
Shall have it, an she will.
Olaf. Son, you say wisely.
Kiartan [*aside to Thorgerd*].
A sweet soul to make happy : here's a thing
To live for.
Hrefna. I am not worthy. . . . No, I cannot !
Kiartan [*drawing near to Hrefna*].
I'll never see it deck another head :
It fitted yours too well. Where is the fire ?
Exit, through the arras toward the fire hall.

Thorgerd. Go, stop him, child : he'll burn it.

Hrefna follows him.

Olaf, see !

Did I not say 'twould all be for the best ?
She's worth a brace of Gudruns.

Olaf. That's the truth !

But what will Asgeir say ?

Kalf. Small doubt of that.

Olaf. Your hand, my lad,—and proud I am to take it.

Enter Bolli from the door behind Kalf.

Bolli. Good-morrow, foster father.

Olaf. Hail, my son.

And how slept Gudrun ?

Bolli. Well.

Kalf [*turning to face him*]. Bolli, I greet thee.

Bolli. Kalf ! *Stands amazed.*

Kalf. I was thinking, when a bolt from heaven
Comes crashing through the rafters, such a guest
Looks not for civil greeting.

Bolli [*recovering*]. Kalf, I trow,
Is always welcome.

Kalf. Thy hand upon it, fellow.

They shake hands.

Kiartan will joy to see you.

Bolli. I fear him not.

Kalf. Ah !

Olaf, who has gone hurriedly to intercept Kiartan, meets him at the arras.

Olaf. Son, your vow ! Remember !

Kiartan pushes past Olaf, leaps over the benches, and, rushing up to Bolli, seizes him fiercely by the shoulders.

Kiartan. Ah, friend Bolli,
I greet a married man. You timed it well.

Bolli. Kiartan, I timed it not.

Kiartan. Hast a new tongue ?
The one I knew was not so glib on lies.

Bolli. Had this one lied, then would I shear it off.

Kiartan. Out with it, man ! My sword is at your service :
Good steel : the gift of Tryggvason the King.

Bolli. Not for my tongue ; there is no guilt in that.

Kiartan. Now on my word, he shows a brazen front !
Look in my face and utter that lie again.

Bolli. I speak the truth : the shavelings fixed the feast,
Not I.

Kiartan. Then, by the rood, and by this arm,
Not once nor twice the ransom of your life,
Swear that you said not I was wed in Norway.

Bolli. I swear it.

Kiartan. Swear you did not bribe that dog
Who vowed he saw the wedding.

Bolli. That I swear.

Kiartan. Swear that you spoke to make my honour clear.

Bolli [*pointing to Olaf and Thorgerd*]. These are my witnesses.

Kiartan. Now swear that these
Knew from your lips the cause that kept me.

Bolli. That
I say not.

Kiartan. Aha !

Bolli. Ask Gizur as to that.
The King bade hide that you were hostage.

Kiartan. You
Consenting ?

Bolli. Else they had sworn you loved the Princess.
To spare your Gudrun that I held my peace.

Kiartan. *My* Gudrun!

Bolli. Then they witnessed you were wedded.

Olaf. Bolli tells truth—he ever stood your champion.

A pause. Kiartan leans on his sword and reflects. Then, suddenly and spontaneously,

Kiartan. Fellow, your hand! I wronged you. Others plotted,—
Snorri, belike,—not you. Your brow is clear:
Happier it might be, on your wedding morrow.
Now grieve not; drink the sun from Gudrun's heart:
I will not cast a shadow on your joy.
Let us not meet too oft; else, man, I warn you
Iceland might grow too small for me and Gudrun.—
Our lives are knit in tangle of the Norns;
But there is strength in me to cut the knot.
So, good-bye, lad: think kindly of old Kiartan:
We have been glad together, you and I.
Now you'll have mirth with Gudrun. As for me,—
Oh, we'll do well enough, my lad: good-bye!

Bolli. Hold! you were keen to question. Think again:
Have you no doubts? It is not well to part
With doubts unspoken.

Kiartan. None. You have not blenched.
I brush the slur away, and see your soul
As through a glass, untarnished. Here's my hand:
I doubt you not.

Bolli [*drawing back*]. Then, listen all! I lied!
Foully I lied! My tongue kept troth alone.
Then, of this carcass soaked in lies preserve
Nought but the scrupulous tongue; for all the rest
Is vileness. Slay me! Cast to the winds my ashes,
Lest they should plague and poison all the land.

Olaf. Man, you are mad! Believe him not, my son.

Bolli. Sane as a Skald ! To lies that damned my friend
I gave the nod ; and now they come to roost :
Breed, swarm about my life ; taste in my food ;
Mock me from Gudrun's eyes ; and like a ghost
Hover betwixt us ! Myriad little lies,
All silent, silent, even as I was silent,
Swarm, and they suck like vampires. Gudrun's lips
Wax pale, her eyes lose fire, that harp her voice
Is jangled,—half the sweet strings broken——
Olaf. Mad !
His moods of late have shown it.
Bolli. Am I mad ?
Hear then ! That liar swore he saw you wedded
After our ship left Nidoyce. That same ship
Carried two liars, slayers of souls ; and one
Lied, as the sword slays, boldly ; but the other—
Still as the plague !
Kiartan. I know. One ran on foot,
Joining the ship at Thrandheim Mouth, but you
Tarried in the fiord becalmed.
Bolli. We tarried not,
But ran before the breeze like souls that sin.
Kiartan. You knew he lied ?
Bolli. I knew it. Snorri bribed him.
All men believed ; Gudrun believed ; and I
Was silent. Now destroy me.
Kiartan. Ah, Bolli, Bolli !
You did not well. Gudrun is good to have,
Yet if she knew this, think you she would love you ?
Bolli. Out with your sword !
Kiartan. Hate, they say, in a wife
Brings hell about your life.
Bolli. More cause to kill me.

Kiartan. I loved you, Bolli. Think : a friend that loves
Is better than a wife that hates you.
Ha, you fool ! *Seizes him fiercely by the throat.*
Could you not think of that ?
Olaf [*in alarm*]. My son, your vow !
Kiartan [*loosening his hold and speaking hoarsely, but with calmness*]. Fear not, my father : Bolli is a man :
There's that within my heart that likes him still.
Bolli. Out with your sword, I say !
Kiartan. You wish to see it ?
Look then ! The blade is true : none such in Iceland.
In many a fight it should have saved my friend ;
May yet : who knows ? For, see : a cross is here,—
Carven upon the hilt. Besides, you still
Are Bolli, and your wife is Gudrun. Brother,
We both love Gudrun. There's a thing to do. . . .
No matter. Come to a feast I'll bid this se'nnight :
And when I speak, hold silence. Go in peace.

ACT IV

SCENE.—*Herdholt, the Guest Hall, as in Act III. Kiartan is surveying the hall in preparation for guests.*

Enter Hrefna.

Kiartan. Hail, Hrefna! Lo, our wedding feast is spread!
Sit there [*pointing to the high-seat on the principal bench*], and
let me look upon my bride.—
The kirtle fits you well.
Hrefna. That seat is Gudrun's.
Kiartan. Now it is yours and Gudrun sits below.
Hrefna. Is she not held chief lady of the Dales,—
Being of the house of Kiallak?
Kiartan. That I wot not:
At wedding feasts the bride is honoured most . . .
Now don this golden coif.
Hrefna [*trying it on*]. So?
Kiartan. That is brave!
Hrefna. I will not wear it, lest Gudrun think I mock her.
Kiartan. You mock her not.
Hrefna. Dear, but the grandeur irks me.
Could I but kneel, and look up in your eyes,
And worship——
Kiartan. Nay, but have a care, my bride:

When women make us gods, like Thor we tumble,
And out of us crawl vermin.
Hrefna. Kiartan, dear,
You'll think of Gudrun ?
Kiartan. Belike, I'll not forget her.
Hrefna. Nor bid me wear the coif, and take the high-seat ?
Kiartan. Aye, by the rood, you shall.
Hrefna. The coif was hers.
I have no right to gifts you won for Gudrun.
Kiartan. I won this for my bride. Maugre their lies,
You trusted me, but Gudrun would not trust,
Nor wait : she judged me out of court.
Hrefna. Three years
She waited.
Kiartan. 'Sooth, I blame her not. Natheless,
I will not shame my bride to please a Kiallak.
That seat is yours.
Hrefna. Would Kiartan be unkind ?
Kiartan. To Kiartan, not to Gudrun. Here's a fight
Fiercer than swords and bow-hail ; and I wage it
For her not less than you.
Hrefna. I'd liefer sit
Lowest among the thralls than wear that coif
To anger Gudrun.
Kiartan. Listen, Hrefna, then :
Since I returned—to you alone I say it—
Thrice have the eyes of Bolli's wife met mine,
And thrice they beckoned me. Now, look you, child :
What would you have me do ? Play double game ?
Keep two lamps burning,—Bolli's hearth being dark ?
Hrefna. Not that !
Kiartan. Quit Hrefna, then ?
Hrefna. Ah, never !

Kiartan. No.
Then let us end it. It is better so:
For all the world has changed to me of late.
The outward good seems vain, the inward draws me:
Aye, through your eyes it draws me,—through your eyes!
Hrefna, we'll end it.

Hrefna. Gudrun's eyes are fairest.

Kiartan. 'Sooth, she is like a goddess; but methinks [*kissing her forehead*]
Here where I touch you—here be better things!

Hrefna. Can little Hrefna be so much to Kiartan?

Kiartan. A cross of flame burnt lately on my brow:
You kissed that cross away.

Hrefna. Oh, I could weep,—
Could weep for joy to hear you say that word.

Kiartan. So happy, child? But what of those at Laugar?
Mark me, a reptile coils among these dales,
Sleeping, and in the hollow of his rings
Two birds have built their nest: the one is Bolli,
My friend, the other Gudrun whom I love.
You'll bear to hear me say I love her still?

Hrefna. Dear, you shall always. . . . Is that reptile Snorri?

Kiartan. 'Tis Bolli's lie. Coming, I trod upon it,
And stirred its fangs. But I can slay that reptile:
I only; and, so help me God, I will:
Though Gudrun's love die with it. She must hate
Bolli or me: she shall hate me, not Bolli.

Hrefna. I cannot help but worship.

Kiartan. Let that be.
But stand you by me. When my speech is made
There will be those who'll say rough words of Kiartan.
You'll know me, Hrefna, though all the world misknows.

Hrefna. Is there no other way? 'Twill hurt you so

To think that Gudrun hates you.
Kiartan. Wear the coif;
Take you the high-seat. We will kill her fondness,—
For her sake and for Bolli's.
Hrefna. Kiartan, think!
That soft bright love in Gudrun's heart you know,
But there's a thing beside, not soft, not bright:
The love will die, but *that* will leap to life.
Kiartan, I saw it once! Brave not that terror,—
I implore you, brave it not.
Kiartan. You judge her ill.
Is gentle Hrefna jealous?
Hrefna. Have I shown it?
Kiartan. Tears?
Hrefna. Oh, you close my mouth!
Kiartan. Aye, with a kiss.
Howbeit for all your pretty pleadings, child,
I'll have my way.
Hrefna. Kiartan is wont to have it.
Still—still I fear!
Kiartan. Fear nought. This course seems good,
Like song and sunset: why we know not, but methinks,
As by desires and tastes the senses speak,
So does the soul declare itself alive
By pity of friends and love of noble deeds:
And as with poisonous food, though sweet and fair,
The nostrils nauseate, so conscience warns
The soul of that which slays it; and if I
Knowing what woe, what wrack to those I love
Hangs on that issue, speak no word to save them,
My soul drinks poison, it shrinks, its life shall wane.
Evil may come; but less I count the risk
To this the dubious life of flesh and sense

Than to the firm and actual element,
The life which loves the good and scorns the base.
Hrefna, to none save Bolli have I thus
Laid bare my soul. It needs that you go with me.
To you my debt is greatest. Will you, Hrefna?

Hrefna is speechless: she takes his hand and lifts it to her lips.

Your eyes assure me. . . . When your brother comes
Bid him say nought, however my speech amaze him.
Here is my father.

Enter Olaf.

Father, 'tis my wish
That Hrefna takes the high-seat,—Gudrun that
On the lower bench.

Olaf. I doubt, my son. . . . Well, well!
Even as you will. I'll take my place beside her.

Kiartan. That I had thought of. Thanks, my father, thanks!
And when I speak, though what I say perplex you,
Gainsay me not. Belike the folk that love me
Will pry beneath my prating: that's no matter. . . .
Here come the priests.

Enter the monks Gizur and Hialti. They move about sprinkling the hall with holy water.

Olaf. They call that holy water;
I call it dews of foul hypocrisy.
Howbeit salt water harms not fish nor fellow,
So let them sprinkle.

The guests troop in: among them Snorri and Thorod Scatcatcher, Kalf Asgeirson, Bolli, Gudrun, Oswif, Thordis, and their sons. Hrefna goes aside and speaks with Kalf.

Snorri. Olaf, by your leave,—

You like our Faith no better ? Shall I lead ?
Olaf. Aye ; for we wash our hands o't. Never a feast
Until yon shavelings rid us of their rede
Will Olaf oversee. So sit ye there :
Goodwife, we watch their foolings from below.
Snorri [*loudly as master of ceremonies*].
Way for the Queen o' the Dales, great Oswif's daughter !
To left of her will sit the son of Olaf,
His bride beside him. On the other side,
Lord Bolli.
Kiartan. Hold ! My bride shall take that seat.
No hurt to Oswif's kin :—this day at least
My bride shall queen it in her new abode.
Olaf. Honour us, Gudrun, sitting on my right,
Here on our lower bench.
Snorri. I bow to Kiartan :
He is the hero. . . . What said Oswif the wise ?
Thordis. Oswif said " Humph."
Uspak. By Thor, he well may say it,
Seeing us sons of Kiallak lick the dust
Before these upstarts of an underling,
These brats of Koll-a-dales. I'll quit the hall
Sooner than take this shaming.
Gudrun. Peace, my brother !
It is but right that he who makes this feast
Should order all things as his heart ordains.

Uspak mutters. Gudrun takes her place with Olaf and the kindred of Oswif at the lower bench. Hrefna takes the high-seat.

Kiartan. As did my sires before me unto their brides,
Hrefna, I crown you with this golden coif
Giv'n me for mine by Ingibiorg, the Princess.

The priests mumble a Latin grace.

Snorri. Drink to the health of Kiartan and his bride:
No breaker of vows this mighty son of Olaf:

Mutterings at the lower bench.

Kindred, why murmur? I know not what ye mean.
One vow at least is kept: who asks for more?
Times change and brides are taken: he would win
A queenly gift to deck his wife; and lo,
Next time we meet she dons it!

The murmurs are renewed.

Iceland holds
No cloth like that—eight ounces, I'll be sworn,
All beaten gold! Well may the bride be proud!
Touching the winning, note withal he said
No syllable as to how or whence or where.
Conquests there be of bower or battlefield——

Hoarse laughter from the lower benches.

—Enough that he has won it! Drink his health;

They drink.

And may he live to win a hundred gifts
Likewise—[*the laughter is renewed*]—And she whom all men praise, fair Hrefna,
Be wearer of them all—[*the laughter grows uproarious*]—Nay, nay, by Thor,
I know not why ye laugh. Hail, Iceland's Sigurd!
Thor send you luck. [*They drink again.*] I fear these folk be rude.

Kiartan. Nay, priest, I thank thee: weddings should be merry.
I had a speech to make, but let that be.
Their laughter blew like winter through my brain,
And all the words flew out. This only stays:
Someone spat venom on a noble name—
A princess's. Out upon him! It is false!

Her bower is sacred as the holy virgin's.

He pauses, and then speaks with care and emphasis.

If I have wooed, it was in manly wise,
The King of Norway favouring ; but ye say,—
" Ill sped my suit " ; and that I'll not deny ; *More lightly.*
And since the dearest maiden is my bride,
Right glad I am !

Voices from the Higher Bench. Well spoken, Kiartan.

Olaf. Ah !

A Voice. There's sour blood sweetened.

Kiartan. Sour blood, no, in sooth :
Nought at this feast take sourly : all is mirth.
No friend of mine is he who takes it ill.
I drink to Snorri.

He draws out his sword and shows it to Snorri.

Behold, good priest, our sword.
" King's gift," we call it : gear no woman toys with ;
In twoscore fights we won it from the King.
There is a cross upon the hilt. [*He points to it and lowers his voice for Snorri's ear alone.*] That saves you,—
That only : else, by Thor, the blade had drunk
Your wassail deep in redder wine than ours.
[*Aloud.*] Pass round the sword, for all good folk to see.

As it is handed round and admired,

Liot [*sings*].

What God stands white in the guest hall,
In raiment woven of sun-rays ?
What rushing of wings or of waters ?
What new boon born unto men ?
Fill full your horns with the foam cup ;
Gild well your goblets with god-ale :
Your wine is changed to a wonder,
Your water is wrought into wine.

Hialti [*to a guest*]. What strange old man is chanting ?
The Guest. Liot the blind :
Folk say his darkness glows with shapes unseen ;
Real things are shadows and our shadows real.
Hialti. There was a wedding feast in Cana-stead,
Near Micklegarth, where God's feet first trod earth.
Not of this feast, but that, the old man sings.
Liot [*sings*].

O King of the league of boon fellows,
O Killer of vengeance with kindness,
The truster has sat with the traitor,
And anger is not in the cup !—
Fill full your horns unto brimming ;
Let gush your goblets with god-ale !
Thou pourest the wine of our wassail,
Thy board is the breadth of the world.

Another Guest. What folk can see in that old Skald I wot not :
No more than other carles he kens the seasons,
Nor wards the evil eye, nor lays the ghosts.
Liot [*sings*].

Now Sigurd drank and his strength grew :
He shunned not the valley of shaming,
Where the World-worm, mark of his weapon,
Lay coiled on the hearth of his kin.
Fill full your horns with the foam-cup,
And clank your goblets and drain them :
When the World-worm falls to his weapon
The dusk of the gods will be past.

First Guest. His song goes wandering in and out old legends.
Second Guest. What's this of Sigurd's kin ? That's not i' the tale.
Third Guest. There go the shavelings [*following with his*

eyes Hialti, who has risen and joined Gizur]. Now begins their mumming.

Those of the new faith go aside, and feast
On bread and wine that folk say works a marvel:
A god's veins were the vineyard.

Kiartan and Hrefna rise; others follow.

Come and see them:
This way into the fire hall. Olaf stays:
Scorning the Faith.

First Guest. He also rises. Look!

Second Guest. He has crossed to speak with Kiartan. Listen, now.

Olaf. Son, we will take the Faith.

Kiartan [*with enthusiasm*]. Ho, priests,—hurrah!
Bring ye the font: my father takes the Faith.

Olaf. From your hands, Kiartan, not from theirs.

The guests file out into the fire hall. Holy water is handed to Kiartan, who marks Olaf and Thorgerd with the sign of the cross, they kneeling before him in silence.

Hialti. In nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus sancti. Amen.

Exeunt all but Uspak and Helgi. The lights burn low.

Helgi. What now?

Uspak. What now?

Helgi. Are we the sons of Kiallak?

Uspak. When Kiartan is a scabbard for our blades.

Helgi. When Herdholt reeks in smoke as high as Snowfell.

Chant swells up from the fire hall.

Quia per incarnati verbi mysterium, nova mentis nostrae oculis lux tuae claritatis infulsit: ut dum visibiliter Deum cognoscimus, per hunc in invisibilium amorem rapiamur——[1]

[1] Because, by the mystery of the incarnate Word, a new light of Thy glory hath shone upon the eyes of our mind: that while visibly we know God, by Him we may be drawn to the love of things invisible.

Uspak. Hrefna shall pay full dearly for her coif.
Helgi. Belike a widow's weeds will suit her better.
Uspak. The seat we sat on smelt of thralls and franklins.
Helgi. Soon it shall smell of fire.
Uspak. Let fire alone.
It burns the fingers.
Helgi. Every dog we spare
Will live to bite us.
Uspak. The old dog dotes on peace.
Helgi. He dotes on Kiartan more.
Uspak. On Bolli next.
If either cub were dead he'd lick the other.
By Thor, we'll make a scabbard out of Kiartan,
A shield of Bolli.
Helgi. How ?
Uspak. His back is broad.
There's striking room behind, and if his kin
Strike back, the bane is Bolli's.
Helgi. Sooth ; but he
Couples with Kiartan.
Uspak. Nought like the pull of wedlock
To snap old cables.
Helgi. Gudrun spoke against us.
Uspak. Deem not that cats lack claws because they cushion.
How go their cooings think you ?
Helgi. Gudrun's ?
Uspak. Aye :
The girl talks little of late.
Helgi. They go but sourly.
Uspak. She broods on something.
Helgi. 'Tis not love I deem.
Uspak. Go, search the arras.
Helgi rises and peers behind the curtains.

Chant [*heard from the fire hall*].

Hanc igitur oblationem servitutis nostrae, sed et cunctae familiae tuae, quaesumus Domine, ut placatus accipias: diesque nostros in tua pace disponas——[1]

Uspak. No one watches?

Helgi. None.

Uspak. Hand me that sword.

Helgi brings him Kiartan's sword "King's Gift," which has been left on the benches.

Uspak. Now Kalf's.

Helgi brings him a sword which hangs among others upon the wainscotting. He takes them both out of the sheath, lays Kalf's on the bench, and examines Kiartan's.

Good steel, by Thor!

Against it all our Iceland blades are grass.

Springs over the bench, waves Kiartan's sword in the air, and seizes the swearing-stone.

Now by the hammer of Thor I, Uspak, swear
Kiartan's own sword shall drink of Kiartan's blood.

He places Kiartan's sword in Kalf's scabbard, and conceals it in the folds of his cloak. Next he puts Kalf's sword in Kiartan's scabbard and hands it back to Helgi, who replaces it on the bench where it was found. Meanwhile chanting wells again from the fire hall.

Chant. Hic est enim Calyx Sanguinis mei, novi et aeterni testamenti; mysterium fidei; qui pro vobis et pro multis effundetur in remissionem peccatorum.[2]

[1] Therefore, O Lord, we beseech Thee that graciously Thou wilt accept this offering of the service of us and of Thy whole family, and dispose our days in Thy peace.

[2] For this is the cup of My blood, of the new and everlasting testament, the mystery of faith, which shall be shed for you and for many, unto the remission of sins.

Helgi. How compass that ?

Uspak. Know you a lonely barn
High on the rocky path by Ottar's Wood ?
The gorge beneath it cleaves the fells in twain,
And hides a boiling torrent.

Helgi. Well I know it.

Uspak. That way will Kiartan pass, belike alone,
To-morrow. In the barn is hiding room,
And from the hill across the gorge a thrall
Shall signal his approach, and warn us lest
He goes attended : then the dog shall pass ;
If not, we'll have his soul, the gorge his carcass ;
And folk shall say he fell, and so was lost.
Or if blood cries, then Bolli shields us. . . . Ha !
Here comes the sister. Hide !

They draw the arras ; Liot is seen behind it. They hide. Enter Gudrun and Bolli.

Gudrun. Sit, Bolli, and drink my health. The other folk
Are still at Mass.

They seat themselves. Bolli drinks.

A clever minx that Hrefna.

Bolli. A maid of mickle daring, says her brother.

Gudrun. Three years ago, when those two snatched your Kiartan,
She dared to mock me with a draggled wreath,
All weeds and yellow marigolds——

Bolli. I mind me.

Gudrun. Here, on my brow, she placed them. Now she tosses
That little head of hers, all pink and white,
Proud as a princess, crowned with gold—my gold.

Bolli. Who ever saw the like !

Gudrun. Those eyes of hers

Are deep, like witches' : they can pierce the future.
When on this brow her dead weeds drooped, she saw,
Far down the future, shining like the sun,
My gold on hers.
Bolli. Strange fancies those !
Gudrun. Ah, Bolli !
Hrefna will e'en go laughing to her bed to-night,
While I go shamed and mocked at,—all my flowers
Drooping in dreams of all men.
Bolli. Nay, in sooth :
Your flowers are fresh as morning.
Gudrun. Once they were :
I was the proudest maid in Iceland once :
I, and no other, have sat where Hrefna sat :
I, the sole daughter of the house of Kiallak.—
To-day I sat with bonders.
Bolli. True, by Thor !
Better to kill a man than shame his wife !
Gudrun. Bolli, you did right well to make believe
Your Kiartan had not wooed the Princess. That
Was friendly in you, Bolli. But you see
It was all false.
Bolli. He did not wed her, though.
Gudrun. He sought the match : no less the wrong to me.
Bolli. That's true.
Gudrun. As lightly as he quitted me
When Hrefna schemed, so lightly did he woo
The Princess ; aye, and so lightly now once more,
His vows being broken and my love despised,
He shames me before all men.
Bolli. Yea, in sooth,
I take it ill of Kiartan.
Gudrun. Not so lightly

He'd rue it,—if my husband were a man.

Bolli [*bitterly*]. Your husband! By what token am I your husband?

Gudrun. Your lack of love. No man, no husband loves.
O shame! They would take all and give back nothing.
Not so we win the least thing; yet methinks
Love is of all the greatest.

Bolli. I would give
All—even life itself.

Gudrun. You would not give
A finger—or a friend.

Bolli. Then try me.

Gudrun. I will.
Drink, and be happy: you may win me yet.

The guests troop in from the fire hall; Gudrun and Bolli mingle with them; Uspak and Helgi come out from behind the arras and speak aside.

Helgi. What think ye? Will the bull go to the barn?

Uspak. The bull goes where the heifer leads. To-night
We'll speak with her. . . . See! Kiartan takes the sword:
Buckles it on his side. . . . Ha! ha! Come, fly!

Exeunt, unobserved by the throng: Thorod Scat-catcher taps Snorri on the shoulder: he turns.

Thorod. Whoop, master! All goes well: what think ye?

Snorri. Aye.

Thorod. The old fool takes the Faith. Much good he'll get!

Snorri. That cow is milked.

Thorod. How liked ye Uspak's looks?

Snorri. As well as thunder when my enemy's hay
Rots on the ground, and the last load of mine
Is tossed and on the stack.

Goes to the dais and lifts his drinking-horn.

Drink to great Olaf!
Long life to him, his son, his wife and nephews,
And fellowship and peace to all the Dales.

They drink with great uproar.

Snorri. Now will we join these twain and seal their bliss.

ACT V

SCENE.—*The interior of a great barn. Darkness, except for a bright light entering through a hole or small window high in the wall to rear of the stage, and a streak through the crevice of the great folding doors which occupy almost the entire rear. A small side door to left. A ledge or large shelf to right beneath the hole.*

Enter from the small door first Gudrun, with an Old Man, then Bolli.

Gudrun. This way, dear Bolli.

Bolli. Here be rats, not cattle.

Gudrun. The barn is cool and clean ; there's straw to rest on.

She reclines on the straw. The Old Man retires to another corner.

Bolli. Thor ! But how dark !

Gudrun. Come closer to me, Bolli.
Yes : it was bright out there in Ottar's Glen.

Bolli. What made you pause just now, and stand, and gaze ?
Strange thoughts belike.

Gudrun. Oh, nothing : why do you ask ?

Bolli. That streak of light, spraying your hair and cheeks,
Surprised a wondrous look,—so fierce, so eager.

Gudrun. Dear, 'twas the dawn of love. Mind you the day
When folk came home from Norway ?

Bolli. Well I mind it.
Gudrun. Then fell such gloom upon me ; but a ray
Lights me at last.
Bolli [*eagerly*]. You love me ?
Gudrun. I think I do——
Bolli [*sullenly*]. I doubt you'll ne'er do that : I've hoped too long.
Gudrun. Dear, sit beside me, clasping, so, my waist.
Bolli. How your heart flutters ! Gudrun ! Is it true ?
Gudrun. Nay, what ?
Bolli. You love me ?
Gudrun. What beside——
Bolli. You start,—
Listening.
Gudrun. Yes,—hark ! What noise——?
Bolli. Beneath the chasm
A river in the entrails of the earth
Rumbles and churns and makes a mighty sound.
Gudrun. Not that. It seemed like galloping horses.
Bolli. Ah !
The torrent in the woods.
Gudrun. Yes, yes : how foolish ! . . .
Is it not dear to sit like this ? Now kiss me.
Bolli. Gudrun !
Gudrun. Not quite so fiercely, love : it hurts.
Bolli. Forgive ! I'll be so tender.
Gudrun. Bolli, listen :
On false pretence I brought you here to-day.
All must be secret : sooner I could not speak.
There is a ban upon our loves.
Bolli. A ban ?
Gudrun. Yes : it concerns the honour of our kindred.
A treasure is hid, and he alone who finds it

Can be in truth my husband.

Bolli. Where? In this barn?

Gudrun. Close by.

Bolli. Had I but known, I had brought a spade.

Gudrun. The weapon will be found.

Bolli. The weapon?

Gudrun. Yes.

Spades would be useless: there's a beam to fell,—
A mighty beam! Ah, Bolli, you are strong;
These limbs are great,—full twice my brothers'.

Bolli. Come,
Give me the axe.

Gudrun. They'll bring it soon. It is
The blade of him who flung our treasure low,—
Who sunk it in the mire,—who took away
The honour of the Kiallaks and your bride.
That blade you wield to win me. Here they come.

Enter Uspak, Helgi, and their brother Jorrad. Uspak silently hands Gudrun a sword; then leaps on to the ledge and peers through the window. Helgi and Jorrad wait beneath.

Bolli. Gudrun, what means all this?

Gudrun. Speak not, dear Bolli.

Helgi [*to Uspak*]. No signal yet?

Uspak. Nay, hold! The thrall stands up;
Large on the sky-line of the hill I see him,
Shading his eyes against the sun to watch.

Helgi. Belike he comes more speedily than we thought.

Uspak [*suddenly and fiercely, leaping down from the ledge*].
The gods are with us! Kiartan is alone!
Now can we safely leave the barn and face him.
Up with you, folk! He marches to his doom!
Come, Bolli!

Gudrun. Take this sword; avenge your wife;
Strike down the beam that stands athwart our honour:
Then have you won me body and soul. But turn,
Flinch, falter, parley, bring me back my shame,—
Then am I lost to you for ever. Go!

He takes the sword, as if bewildered, and follows the brothers. They push at the small door, opening it with effort, and carefully closing it behind them; then exeunt.

Gudrun [*to the Old Man*]. Thrall, climb that shelf.
Old Man. What, I?
Gudrun. Make speed. I'll help you.
Old Man. An ill bed for an aged carle.
Gudrun. Come, now!
Old Man. Has not fair Gudrun eyes to look herself?
Gudrun. There's that to see that I can bear to hear,
Not look on. Climb the shelf.

He scrambles up, and peers out.

What see you?
Old Man. A path
Betwixt two woods, a gorge,—a hill beyond it,—
The merry sunlight over all.
Gudrun. The path
Is empty?
Old Man. Like this hand.
Gudrun. Tell all you see,
And it shall soon be filled.
Old Man. The birch-wood stirs:
There is an angry tempest in it: yet the sun
Shines, and the air is calm.
Gudrun. Still nothing?—Watch!
Old Man. Foxes are in the bramble.
Gudrun. Look again.

Old Man. The dead leaves of the dead years lie and rustle.
Gudrun. No sound beside? Go closer to the window.
Old Man. Thor thunders at his anvil in the glen. . . .
Some say it is the river. . . . Aha!
Gudrun. What now?
Old Man. Out of the wood a great man comes a-striding,
Noble of aspect. . . . Now he stands . . . and stares. . . .
Sees something in the wood. . . . His blade is drawn,—
His back against the rock,—his shield uplifted.
Gudrun. Who spoke?
Old Man. The great man: "Three to one," he said.
Gudrun. Not four?
Old Man. They leap at him; he parries; one
Has fallen.
Gudrun. Who?
Old Man. Lord Jorrad.
Gudrun. Where is Bolli?
Old Man [*pointing as if to count*].
Lord Uspak—Helgi—Jorrad: Bolli I see not.
Gudrun. Craven! He sells his kin!
Old Man. Frey! There he stands.
Close to the cliff.
Gudrun [*to herself*]. That soul's a hunted hare:
What if it leap the gorge? Then may it go
But ill with the house of Oswif. [*To the Old Man.*] Goodman,
look!
Whither is my husband facing? Toward the barn,
Or down toward the chasm?
Old Man. Toward the barn:
His head is bent; he leans upon his sword.
Gudrun. Sulking: that's Bolli.
Old Man. Frey help us! How they hack,
And bleed,—such lusty men: a woful sight!

Uspak is down,—now Helgi.

Gudrun. We are lost !

[*To the Old Man.*] Fool ! Do you hide your head ?

Old Man. I fear ! I fear !

Gudrun. Watch, and tell all, or you shall die. . . . What now?

Old Man. The great man's sword is bent ; he wipes his brow,
And straightens it on his knee.

Gudrun. That sword may save us.
Is any killed ?

Old Man. One drags a wretched body
All drenched with blood, for shelter by the barn,

Gudrun. Who ?

Old Man. Uspak. Helgi rises—Jorrad—down !

Gudrun. What of my husband ?

Old Man. Still as any tree.

Gudrun. Thor send he root and grow there ! Traitor !

Old Man. Ah !

Deep Voice [*from without*]. Come Bolli ! For or against me ! Strike !

Gudrun. His voice !
Oh ! Can I bear to hear it ?

Old Man. All are down.
Lord Bolli has moved ; his sword is drawn ; they face :
Two giants in the sunlight.

Gudrun. Have they spoken ?

Old Man. No word. The birds are singing.

Deep Voice [*from without*]. Thou or I !
One or the other must die.

Gudrun runs to the side door ; she pulls frantically ; it cleaves to the lintel.

Old Man [*mechanically echoing the words*]. Or the other must die.

DEEP VOICE [*from without*].
Brother, by your hand liefer I were slain,
Than bid you die by mine.

Old Man [*mechanically*]. Brother, by your
Hand liefer I were slain, than bid you die
By mine.

Gudrun [*shrieking*]. Ah, spare him, Bolli!

She pushes violently at the great doors; runs again to the small door; shakes it madly; returns to the great doors: neither will yield.

ANOTHER VOICE [*as if from below*]. Strike, for Gudrun!
Who wins will have her.

Old Man. Ah!

Gudrun [*with horror*]. What hissed? . . . It came
Out of the earth,—down there [*pointing down to her feet*]?
Oh! From within me! [*She shudders.*]
It spoke as from within me!

Old Man. Belike Lord Uspak—
He crouches by the barn.

Gudrun. Shout, fellow! Shout:
"Gudrun bids Bolli spare him."

Old Man [*shouting*]. Gudrun bids . . .

He flings up his arms.

Too late! He dropped his sword—his shield—and then
Lord Bolli smote. Clean through him went the blade!

Gudrun thrusts at the great doors frantically. They both yield, exposing the whole of the back of the stage, and the view described by the old man. In the dazzling light Kiartan is seen lying dead, his head on Bolli's knee.

Bolli [*hoarsely*]. O Kiartan, live! I knew not what I did.
They drove me mad! Have pity on me, Kiartan!
Live!

Uspak [*rising and staggering towards Kiartan*].
Hark! Voices among the wood! Now, quick!
Over the cliff he goes.
Bolli. Who touches him
Shall die.
Uspak. Fool! Wait then! Let them take you so:
Red-handed; but confess—you slew him; we
Are innocent.
Bolli. I wait; but not for man.
They snatch at the body; Bolli lifts his sword; Gudrun interposes, but he thrusts her aside and fells them—then, turning, faces Gudrun.
He is dead. You have your will.
Gudrun. I am not ashamed.
He wronged my kindred—he is paid. And you—
I will be just: you have won me; I am yours.
Bolli makes no answer, but leans over the body of Kiartan. Gudrun gazes thereon.
'Sooth: he was very fair.
Bolli. You also, once:
Yes, once I thought so.
Gudrun. Look now! Am I not?
Do I look wrought, or rueful? No! Believe me,
I shall go home and spin twelve ells of yarn,
Deeming my day well spent,—and yours, my husband.
Bolli, kneeling beside Kiartan's body and stroking his hair, as if in a dream, ignores her.
Right glad I am; and most of all for this:
Hrefna will not go laughing to her bed
To-night.
Helgi. Come then, and quickly.
Gudrun [*still addressing Bolli*]. I regret
Nothing: all men will say it is but just.

He insulted me ; his vows were made to me ;
Three years I waited, counting every hour :
There are full many hours in three years, Bolli ;—
And all those hours that man was mocking me,
Wooing his Ingibiorg.

Bolli [*looking up suddenly*]. If that were false——?

Voice in the Wood. Here is a barn. Liot, is this the place ?

Enter, behind Gudrun, Hrefna, with Thorgerd, and Olaf leading Liot.

Gudrun. But it is true : he owned to it himself.
He broke his troth ; he wooed the Princess ;——

Olaf. Blind !
He took false blame upon him, lest that lie
That Bolli countenanced should wreck your lives.
Faithful he was, and loved you to the last.

Hrefna [*casting herself on Kiartan's body*].
Cruel ! And they have killed him !

Gudrun [*to Bolli*]. Is this true ?
You knew they lied ?

Bolli. I knew it.

Gudrun. To him I loved
The most of all things living have I been
Most vile !

Bolli [*wildly*]. I killed him,—I, his friend !
He dropped his weapon : me he would not strike.
O blackness on the breast of Earth ! O blight !
O dog accursed ! Gangrene of lust and lies !
To hell with you !

About to kill himself, his sword is seized by Olaf.

For God's love let me perish.

Olaf flings the sword into the ravine. Bolli bows his head in resignation.

Father, your curse.

Olaf. Say, O my brother's son,
When you were young did we not nurse you kindly,
That seeing our hairs are grey you cut our hearts out?
Hrefna. I do not think he is dead: it cannot be.
The warmth is not all gone,—not all,—not all!
Thorgerd. He used to lie so still,—our little bairn,—
And ah! so merrily laugh when he awoke.
Oh! Oh!
Bolli. If he would curse me—if he would let me die!
Liot [*lifting his hands between Bolli and Gudrun, who are on either side of Kiartan's body*].
Your curse is this: not, coward-like, to run
To haven where perchance no haven is:
Not perish, but live and drink your lie to its dregs.
Gudrun. And mine, O Liot: my sin is more than his.
Liot. Did I not, Gudrun, bid you fear no tempest?
Soul is the sea we sail on; wreck has come
Of canvas large with pride, in passion's gale.
Bright was the Dawn I bade you love,—now dark;
And dark your heritage,—the earth, the sky,
The shimmering fields and shining sea: for lo,
Your deed.
Gudrun. May Loki blind me from the sight!
Liot. Live also, you; and drink to its dregs your pride,
Clutching at love across a gulf of woe,—
The dead white body of him who loved you both,—
And loved too late the soul-born loveliness,—
His body, blanched by you, for aye betwixt you,
Silent, as now, your last words aye unspoken.
But as for him,—these eyes have seen of old
Stars flocking in the sky by some Great Hand
Shepherded to their wattles in the west;
But now upon my noonday darkness beam

Lights more divine, and mightier majesties :
Nor till the stars are blown out in the night
Shall any breath extinguish such a soul.
But you whose eyes still gaze upon our isle,
Lonely amid the foam of far-off seas,
Behold his fame aflame upon the clouds,
His pyre aglow upon the eternal hills !
The aurora is his watch-tower in the sky ;
Iceland shall be God's acre for his bones ;
And, for his dirge and monument, behold
Her wild sea-nesses and her windy walls
And hollow caverns washed with thundering waves.

EPILOGUE

GLITTER of seas, green meadows, sun and rain,
Praise, labour, power, and aims unperfected,
The victor's laurels, and the flowers that twine
The porch of home: all these he weighed, and said:
"Brother, by your hand liefer I were slain
Than bid you die by mine."

Challenged, he weighed, and held them in disdain;
For treason to Love smote all things living dead:
But dying for Love, he felt a light divine
Glow as the dear earth darkened; whence he said:
"Brother, by your hand liefer I were slain
Than bid you die by mine."

Deep from the fount of things it welled amain,—
That light which Galilee on Iceland shed,—
That god of Love which slew their gods malign,
When vengeance died of pity, and Kiartan said:
"Brother, by your hand liefer I were slain
Than bid you die by mine."

Time's waves, that foam, and fall and mount again,
Drown not that conquering voice. Its chords are sped
Like mighty music rolled from some far shrine,
Through secular aisles, and cloisters serpentine,—

Now ruined : but the stars burn overhead,
And in our souls the unfathomed splendours shine :
For life on loveliness is stablishèd :
Nor shall the triumph of that voice decline
Till in one diapason Man hath said :
" Brother, by your hand liefer I were slain
Than bid you die by mine."

SAVONAROLA

TO

AN UNKNOWN FRIEND

PERSONS

Fra Jerome (*Girolamo*) Savonarola, Fra Domenico, Fra Silvestro, Fra Benedetto — *Dominicans or Blackfriars.*

Fra Mariano, *a Franciscan, or Greyfriar.*

King Charles VIII. of France.

Guillaume Briçonnet, *his Minister.*

Roberto Strozzi, *an old Florentine Notable.*

Niccolini, *a Brother of Mercy, sometime his servant.*

Francesco Valori, *of the Piagnoni (Savonarola's) faction.*

Cini, *a convert to the Piagnoni.*

Giuliano Mazzinghi, *of the Arrabbiati (Rabids).*
Piero degli Alberti, *of the Tiepidi (Tepids).*
Dolfo Spini, 'Cecco Cei } *of the Compagnacci (Rakes).*
Gian Ridolfi, *of the Medici faction.*
— *Hostile to Savonarola.*

The Secretary of the "Eight" (*Magistracy of Florence*).

An Eccentric (*Michel Angelo*).

Lapo, *a Philosopher.*

Laodamia, *daughter of Roberto Strozzi.*

Monna Livia, *her Aunt.*

Romolino (the Papal Agent); The Bishop of Vasona; Florentine Dames and Citizens; Mechanics; a Porter; a Usurer; a Tramp; "Children of the King"; French and Italian Officers, etc.

SCENES

ACT I

FERRARA: DUKE ERCOLÉ'S COURT. REVELS.

Many years' interval.

ACT II

PISA, during the French occupation: PALAZZO STROZZI
(*a*) without; (*b*) within.

ACT III

FLORENCE: THE DUOMO.

ACT IV

FLORENCE: THE PIAZZA. (The Trial by Fire, and after.)

ACT V

FLORENCE: (*a*) THE HALL OF THE GREATER COUNCIL;
(*b*) THE PIAZZA.

The Author has in parts of this Play permitted himself a fuller development, both of Theme and Character, than the staged Drama would require.

Grateful is slumber; happiest he, God wot,
Who sleeps in stone while shame and woe endure;
Who feel, who see—once rich—are now most poor:
And blind eyes wealth: ah, hush! and wake me not!

MICHEL ANGELO
(*for the statue of "Night"—*
his Threnody in stone of Florence Enslaved).

ARGUMENT

(1) SAVONAROLA, in his youth, loved Laodamia Strozzi. But to save his life from a plot laid by Lapo, his rival, she feigned contempt of his birth, and plighted to this Lapo her troth. He thereupon dedicated his life to the cause of the redemption of Italy, now, with the Pope at its head, given over to violence, hypocrisy, and vice.

(2) Years pass, and, as preacher and prophet in Florence, he has long foretold the coming of a new Cyrus, who shall purge the Church. And, behold, King Charles of France, with a mighty army, appears before Florence, threatening her destruction. But Savonarola saves the city and becomes its master. For he subdues the King to his will, pledging him to restore Pisa and Leghorn, and to chastise Rome, and Alexander Borgia, her profligate Pope. But in the hour of his triumph, being now a monk, he again meets Laodamia. Her love and sacrifice are disclosed, and his passion is rekindled. Now also, Lapo, spurned after marriage, reappears; and not recognising him, Laodamia is beguiled into a plot to entice Savonarola from his post with the offer of a Cardinal's hat.

(3) Abandoned by Charles, but still master of Florence, Savonarola finds himself pursued by the vengeance of Pope Borgia and his allies. He appeals to Florence to hold firm by the Just Cause; but, being both impatient of virtue and greatly injured in their commerce, the citizens revolt. Pisa and Leghorn are by this time at the Pope's disposal, and of these Lapo has procured the offer: for the city also peace and restored commerce, for Savonarola a Cardinal's hat. The price is the desertion of his cause. Laodamia, thinking once more to save him, joins Lapo in urging this surrender; but his conscience overcomes the temptation.

(4) Not so the conscience of Florence. His appeal fails, and the citizens' faith in him wavers, being rooted, not in right, but in self-interest and the belief in his miraculous powers. His followers are therefore stung by Lapo and his enemies to put these powers to the test by invoking Divine intervention in a trial by fire. The trial is decreed by the Magistracy, and the blame of its failure falls upon Savonarola. He is assaulted, rescued, and recaptured; Laodamia falls in the struggle, and regaining consciousness, beholds him delivered over in chains to his enemies.

(5) The city, defiant of its conscience, now plunges deeper. Justice is prostituted to the dictates of the infuriated Pope, Savonarola is tortured, false confessions are procured, and finally he is condemned to an ignominious death. He passes his last night on bare stones in the Hall of Mercy that he had built. There, silently, one ministers to him, robed in black from head to foot: now must he behold the face, not of Laodamia, but of that Eternal Righteousness for whose cause he suffers death. But, as for the city, its stifled conscience cries, but too late. In his scaffold Florence sees a cross, and in the ringhiera, where they strip him of his raiment, the prætorium of the fated Jews. Now hover the avenging furies that afflicted Italy thereafter unto the third and fourth century. She is weighed in the balance and found wanting, and her kingdom is given unto those Medes and Persians of the North among whom, in the days that followed, the love of trade and empire was not greater than the hatred of violence, hypocrisy, and vice.

ACT I

SCENE.—*The Court of Ercolé, Duke of Ferrara. Revels.*

Enter, amid the revellers, the Greyfriar, Fra Mariano; and with him Francesco Valori, both of Florence.

Mariano. And this, Valori, is Ferrara's Court!
We looked for all the lights of Italy,
And lo, a pack of exiles driven from Florence!

Valori. At cross-roads, Padre, seek for birds and bones.

Mariano. Carrion fowl: they whet their beaks, they croak,—
A gruesome chorus, 'faith; but Florence takes
The tune of all the ages in her octave.

Valori. And a merry tune it is. Good Mariano,
There is a stripling here of Ercolé's Court
Much given to dreams, and musings in the starlight:
There, where the poplars shiver in the wind,
Watching the cold grey river curl and creep,
Like souls that brood on death, last night I met him,
And fell a-talking. Padre, I know not which,—
Either the lurid sunset or his voice,—
Shook me as with the foreblast of a storm.
This young man thinks that on our Tuscan tune
God's trump will crash in strangely.

Mariano. As for me,
I stomach not these youngsters of Ferrara.

Contrast them with Lorenzo's satellites :
Signor, 'tis Athens on the Arno : there
Socrates walks with Charmides again.
But here we find no taste,—Messer, no taste :
The only sin the church should never pardon.
Valori. Not at a price ? For murder, now, they say,
The market price runs at a thousand ducats.
Mariano. Ah, Signor, you are merry. As for Ferrara,
Awhile ago these outlaws clucked of treason :
Ten plots a year, they say ; and nothing hatched.
Now they are mum, Sir. Like the rest of us,
They peck the straw of Plato ;—Sir, they emulate
The Florentine Academy !
Valori. Ha ha !
Our Platonists will tremble for their laurels. . . .
Orsù ! good padre, there goes Monna Livia !
Mariano. A pouch well lined with gold. What girl goes with her,—
Certes, what goddess ?
Valori. Roberto Strozzi's daughter.
Mariano. Ah, yes : Laodamia, Livia's niece :
I knew her as a child. The kitten plays ;
The cat is tetchy.
Valori. Sad her charms are squandered !
God made the kittens for the friars to stroke,—
Eh, padre, eh ?
Mariano. Messer is wont to jest.
And who addresses them ?
Valori. Savonarola,
Son of the duke's physician.
Mariano. That's the man !
Ha, knave ! He dared accost me,—spoke of Florence,—
Plague on the puppy's insolence !—enquired,

Fumbling for phrases, " Had I interest ?
Oh, would I not befriend an aged exile ? "
I' faith, i' faith, Duke Ercolé's serving men
Lack manners,—stink o' the kitchen,—Sir, they stink !

Valori. Truly, in Florence even your turnspit knows
A popular preacher is a little pope.

Mariano. Messer ?

Valori. Nay, pardon. The youth would help the Strozzi,
Being, they say, enamoured of the maid.

Mariano. Raw clowns will serve them ill.

Valori. Padre, you err.
The Strozzi's pride mounts high : they use him not.
He has a zeal too rare : a smouldering fire
Sleeps in his eyes : you noticed ?

Mariano. By your leave,
My wits have other wheat to thresh than this
Of quizzing contadini. Has he power,
Interest with Ercolé,—friends to forward him,—
Wealth or illustrious birth ?

Valori. No interest save
Some intimate converse with the undying dead,
No wealth except the unminted currency
Of opulent ideas, no lustre but
The glow of a great light within his eyes,
And in his voice a murmur of rushing rain
That breaks upon the fever of the hour,
Aquilo upon Maremma. Padre, note :
I have some zest and liking for the youth
Since yesternight. . . . Come, come ! I take an ague
Scenting your Livia's varnish.

They pass, and mingle with the revellers in the rear. Monna Livia and Laodamia come forward. Niccolini, a servant, walks behind them.

Laodamia. Dearest Aunt,
No butterflies like those that flit in cowls !
[*To her servant.*] Catch him, Niccolini : see ! The fine grey moth ! . . .
He is flown !
Livia. A butterfly indeed !
Laodamia. Yes, dear :
That image that he gave you—Cupid, was it ?
Livia. Shame ! 'Twas an infant Saviour.
Laodamia. Saints forgive me !
Ah, but the rosary ! 'Twas bellissimo !
You count his kisses on it, do you not ?
Livia. Ragazza ! Silence ! My lord shall hear of it !
Laodamia. See ! He returns. I knew he could not pass you.
Livia [*to Fra Mariano, who bows to her gallantly*]. Ah, Padre, you forget.
Mariano. Madonna, no !
Am I not overcome ? Ferrara's cup
Brims with your charms !
Livia. Ah, how these priests do flatter !
Mariano. It seems a thousand years till you return
To Florence. . . . What, your niece ?
Livia [*to Laodamia*]. Laodamia,
Fra Mariano, of whom all Florence talks,—
The famous preacher. Do I not, my angel,
Repeat his sermons every day by heart ?
That of the melancholic woes that come
To infants born 'neath Saturn,—ah, how wise !
Just think what griefs were saved if men but knew !—
But, Padre, best of all, that sweet discourse,
How virtue is, of all the attitudes,
Most elegant. . . . Cieli ! Laodamia, look !

He is mad,—stark mad,—your Messer Savonarola !

Mariano. Ears to the grating—stretched along the reeds—
Is it a fit ?

Livia. No. . . . Monstrous ! How they stare !
And, padre, think ! This child acknowledged him,—
Yes, before all the Court ! How folk will chatter !
This comes of letting popolani boys
Play with your daughter in the nursery.
I warned Roberto. Bah ! a mere apothecary,
And, certes, moonstruck, mad ! And yet to Lapo,
A youth whose fortune is on all men's tongues.
She is disdainful. . . . Ah, he is up again,
Pressing his temples. . . . Down ! Flop on the floor !
Can anyone doubt he is crazed ?

Mariano. None, by the Mass !

Laodamia. Ah, no ! My God ! He listens ! Horrible !
There you can hear the captives' clanking chains,
Sobbing and groaning ; children too ; ah me !
I heard it. I—I am gay ; soon I forget :
Poor Girolamo, he cannot : he is so pitiful. . . .
Ever the joy and music here : but there,
Down there the dark and anguish. Oh, my God !
Come, Aunt ! I cannot stay. I would go home.
Come quickly !

Livia. Fool !—and in the padre's presence !

'Cecco Cei [*struts in, singing to his lute, with Cini and Dolfo Spini*].

Don, don, don !
Where the devil are ye gone ?
With a dame or a damigel-la ?
With a neat little paparel-la,[1]

[1] Green goose.

With a green dress on,
And the neck of a swan,
And the eyes of a shy agnel-la ?

Cini. Why that caper, bantam ?

Cei. To catch the eye of——
Hola ! She sees us !

Dolfo. Who ?

Cei. The fair Vannozza.

Cini. Finger on lip, a pretty pout.

Dolfo. A kiss ?

Cini. See, yonder comes Mazzinghi, fresh from Rome :
She greets him.

Enter Giuliano Mazzinghi.

Cei. Bah ! His mouth's a flint, a whinstone ;
Her lip's a rose ; it would not kiss a rock.
" Silence ! " she says. She watches Savonarola.

Cini. What, Girolamo ?

Cei. Yes, ye gods : behold,
Yonder he sprawls—half lunatic, yet half
Power, fellows, power !
Don, don, don !
Where the devil——
I say, sweet Dolfo,
If your Don Roderigo Borgia,
Croesus and Cardinal, were Papa of Rome,
And she, the pretty 'Nozza, his Pappalecca——[1]

Dolfo. Fellow, what then ?

Cei. The devil only knows.
Ask Messer Savonarola.

Dolfo. Gnaf-fé ! Why him ?

Cei. Is not his father Duke's apothecary,

[1] Tit-bit.

His mother Dame Apocalypse? This fit
Precedes a prophecy. Now let us pray.
[*Sings.*] Hail to the merry merry month of May!
Flutter little linnets on the wild-wood spray;
Titter little loves in the shadow of the trees:
'Nozza, 'Nozza is tripping in the leas,
And the red rose blooms in the month of May.
Hola, Mazzinghi! Bruscabocca! Speak!
What is the time of day at Rome?
Mazzinghi. That hour
When the bottegas bask beneath the Pope,
When gold is free as sunlight, and the arts
Bloom like a garden.
Cei. And Cardinals' courtezans
Smirk to you from the convent walls in paint
Bright as a bed of cloves, as if to say:
"Ecco, mio caro! Am I not Mother of Christ?
How do I look the part?"
Cini. Shame, 'Cecco, shame!
Cei. Why not, I say?
Dolfo. Why not?
Cei. Oh, pious Cini!
Art of the clothiers' guild who cut out frocks?
And dost thou fear the frocks will cut thee out?
Sweet maids have pity on our pious loves!
Dolfo. Your monk may buss his misses; that is well.
Mazzinghi. Why not?
Dolfo. Why not?
Cei. Why not? Drink life like wine:
Gulp it not down like physic. As for the rest,
Look well your part and you shall act it well:
The dress inspires the play: your actor knows it,
And shall not Rome, our Holy Mother Church?

Mazzinghi. Where's the philosopher?
Cei. What, our Lapo?
Mazzinghi. So!
Cei. Come, let us seek him.

Links his arm in Mazzinghi's, and leads him to a dark corner beneath an arch.

Mazzinghi. Whither now, friend 'Cecco?
Cei. To Lapo's lair. Behold!
Mazzinghi. I see a cobweb.
Cei. And I a ducal court. Lapo is close,—
[*Pointing to the cobweb*]
Lapo, the glib, the dexterous tarantella;
This causeway is his staircase. Up above
He closets with the Pazzi. Let him swing.
Are you a fly? Too soon he scurries down:
A wasp? He hides: your venom does not find him.
Mazzinghi [*eyeing him curiously and speaking with significance*].
Friend 'Cecco, have you read the newest Plato?
Cei. Philosophy be damned. I love my neck:
Aye, by the Mass, I hug it like a girl's.
Dolfo. Gnaf-fé! I smell a plot. I'd like to know
What's in this fine philosophy of Lapo.
Cei. The devil take philosophy, I say.
A wisp of song is worth a wain of Plato.

Struts off with Dolfo and Mazzinghi, singing:

Lips demure of the damsel say,
"Safe are the woods: come, walk this way!"
The roses blush, for the young men lie
In wait for the wench: "A kiss!" they cry,—
"A kiss on the mouth in the month of May!"

Exeunt. Re-enter Monna Livia and Laodamia.

Laodamia. But, Aunt, he is a scholar.

Livia. Pooh! A scholar!

Laod. And are not such esteemed as counts and princes?
Do they not enter a city with their spoils,
Like conquerors in a triumph?

Livia. Poggio,—yes:
He is a great man: nay, it is very well known
Poggio will be immortal when your Dante,
Aye and Boccaccio, and his naughty tales
(Which, mind, I never catch you with again!)
Are perished and forgotten: though I own
Boccaccio's "Ancient Deities" may live,
Being writ in Latin: but—your Savonarola!
Ragazza, you are a fool.

Laodamia. At least, dear Aunt,
Others are baselier born.

Livia. You speak of Lapo:
Lapo has power, they say.

Laodamia. Bah! 'Tis a poltroon!

Livia. Indeed, but he has writ a book.

Laodamia. Ah, true:
And has the power to fling the silly book
At Girolamo's head. I think he will not:
He is too much afraid.

Livia [*not heeding her*]. Philosophy,
They say: and what they find in it I know not:
But since he wrote it, folk do well, I hear,
To give him twenty soldi to his lira.

Laodamia. O well, though Lapo write a hundred books,
I'll hate him; and until my lord forbids,
I'll speak with Girolamo all the same.
And, Aunt——

Livia. You heard of poor Cannetto?

Laodamia. No.

Livia. Last night they found him dead in Calle Cane,
Stabbed in six places.
Laodamia. Horrible! But 'tis said
He was a wretch,—a Medicean spy.
Oh, yes, I get to know much politics.
Livia [*continuing*]. Also the same Cannetto, so they say,
Was six times named in Messer Lapo's book.
Laodamia [*alarmed*]. Aunt, is it true?
Livia [*disregarding her*]. And when just now you spoke
With Girolamo, Lapo looked and muttered
To one beside him—[*Fra Mariano passes.*] Ah! There goes the Padre!
Laodamia. What did he say?
Livia [*with sudden unconcern*]. I forget. Some of their Greek,
I know not what. His mouth smiled, not his eyes. . . .
Sit, child. Wait for me, while I stop the Padre.
He'll tell us how he liked the automatons.

Monna Livia runs off, leaving Laodamia seated in the nook, beneath the arch. Lapo is seen greeting Mazzinghi, to whom he hands a book.

Lapo. Welcome. [*Aside.*] And how goes Rome?
Mazzinghi. Good news, friend Lapo.
"De Volentiâ ac Potentiâ" is the vogue.
The Passions stir the Powers, and Plato prospers.

Dolfo, Cei, Cini and Alberti join them.

Lapo. Ebbene! Drink my health, and viva Plato!
Thus Aristotle founders.
Dolfo [*pointing to the book*]. What is this?
Gnaf-fé! Let's have your fine philosophy.
Lapo. Sirs, I expound. De Volentiâ ac Potentiâ:
Concerning wills and weapons, powers and passions:
Behold one law of life is everywhere:

Power to the potent: let him rule who can.
Power is the quest of all: but how to win it?—
Even as your varlet, kneeling to your maid,
Becomes her master; as the holy father,
Servant of servants, is the lord of all;
As, corn in hand, a collar round his neck,
Your groom goes forth to catch his mare: even so,
De Volentiâ ac Potentiâ, note the rule:
You ride the Passions and you win the Power.
Amico mio, if in the joke of life
You'd have the laugh your way, then learn this rule.

Dolfo. Riding's the game? Then I'm your jockey, Lapo.
Will't carry us back to Florence? Say you that?
Will't spill the Medici—that drug—that vomit?

Lapo. Soft, Dolfo, soft. I am no politician.
Philosophy is the mistress of my heart.

Enter an Usher. He addresses Lapo.

Usher. Signor, my lord de' Pazzi bade me say
He would be honoured by a word with you.

Lapo. Sir, at your service.

Dolfo. Gnaf-fé! I'll not be fuddled.
What's in the wind?

Lapo. Nay, Dolfo, teach me sword-play;
Then will I teach you all philosophy.
Addio amico mio. *Exit Lapo.*

Dolfo. Fellows, what said I?
Are there not plots a-brewing? Grrr! You smell 'em.
Your Lapo twist my nozzle? No, not he.
I'm dull at books, but, Gnaf-fé! I've a nose.
Lapo's a great man, mark you that, my fellows;
Lapo can brew: he cannot pour the wine,—
Ha, ha! He cannot pour the wine.

Cei. No, Dolfo,
There you come in: he cannot pour the wine.
Dolfo. I'd like to know what's in this book of Lapo.
Cini. Here is a tale, and this may give a clue.
When Lapo and I were lads, and pears were sweet,
Over the wall I'd go, hoist on his back,
And toss the fruit, and take my half in guerdon.
But if by chance they caught me, Zeus! no halving.
My portion was the stick, Lapo's the fruit.
Ecco! The wretch was strolling in the lane;
The pears were hid; he pored upon a book:
The virtuous history of the good young Cyrus!
He ever had a smooth and guileless mien,
And ever, as now, philosophy was his mistress.
Cei. Lapo to the life. Signors, perpend, deduce;
He hoists the Pazzi o'er the walls of Florence,
And what they grab he pockets: if they fail,
Look for him strolling in the lanes of Venice.
Dolfo. Who says old Dolfo cannot smell a plot?
Your Lapo twist my nozzle? No, not he!
Cei. Come, let us scour for crumbs.
Cini. Forsooth not I. *Exit.*
Cei [*struts off with Dolfo singing*].

Shadow and gloom, and the pine woods grey:
"Come, oh Love!" and the lips say Nay!
"Come!" and the leaves and the lovers sigh,
And vow the love that will never never die,
Will never never die in the month of May!

Mazzinghi and Alberti withdraw beneath the arch.
Laodamia is hidden in a recess.

Alberti. You have a copy?
Mazzinghi. Here: this nook is quiet.
"Amico, have you read the newest Plato?"

That is our pass-word ; and you answer " Yes,
And as to *βούλησις* it likes me greatly."
Now for the book : [*he produces it*] this is philosophy.
Letters the Medici intercept, not books ;
So we communicate. The text is Plato.
Lapo writes commentary ; we construe
In cipher, and in cipher we reply ;
In brief, the book is organ of our plot.
Thus [*pointing*] : " Aristotle,"—Venice ; " Plato,"—Rome ;
" De Potentiâ,"—the Pope ; " Volentiâ,"—his son,
Whom as the price of papal aid we name
First Duke of Florence.

Alberti. Santiddio ! what now ?

Mazzinghi. You are startled. 'Tis the Pazzi's plot, remember:
Success is certain : Lapo spins the web.
The damned Medici will be stabbed in church ;
Pazzi will rule ; the exiles all return ;
For us high office.

Alberti. Certes : but the price !
Our City's Freedom !

Mazzinghi. That is lost already :
The Medici crushed it with their golden heel.
Besides, the Pope is old ; soon he will die ;
Then shall we kick the ladder down we climbed with.

Alberti. A duke's a duke. Our faith is pledged withal.

Mazzinghi. Faith is a horse you nourish while it trots :
After, 'tis carrion.

Alberti. Aye, and dead, it stinks.

Mazzinghi. Prithee ? You are not with us ?

Alberti. I'll think on it.

Mazzinghi. Be warned. You hold a secret. You are watched.

Alberti. Trust me with that, my friend. A common hatred
For those who wronged us grapples us together.

Mazzinghi. Be warned, I say; or else. . . . See here, page twelve :—

" Shortly we treat of Ser Cannetto's lapse
Upon the point of εἶδος versus ἰδέα."
Yesterday Lapo wrote this, and to-night
Cannetto met his death in Calle Cane.

Alberto. Santiddio !

Mazzinghi. Beware ! This youth, this Lapo,
Hath a keen logic of his own. His points
Flash on you, forged in steel, round some street corner :
The rest you argue in another world.

Exeunt. Monna Livia with Fra Mariano is about to rejoin Laodamia, who springs up suddenly from her retreat near the speakers, and accosts her aunt wildly.

Laodamia. Instantly, Aunt ! Say, what were Lapo's words,
Seeing me with Girolamo.

Livia. Cieli, child !
What is amiss ? I think you have seen a ghost.
Why, Padre, blessed Santa Caterina
Broken on the wheel was not so pale as she !

Laodamia. Tell me his words.

Livia. Ah, how you flurry me !
'Twas only a bookish quarrel. But Cannetto :
Ah, that was very sad. Padre, you heard ?
Killed in the street !

Mariano. Indeed ! But trust me, ladies,
A bookish quarrel is no bagatelle.
If εἶδος or if ἰδέα hold the field,—
Aristotle, scilicet, or Plato,—seems
To us who are learned men, of more account
Than whether Rome is held by Turk or Pope.

Livia. 'Faith ! Now you put me in mind of Lapo's words :

" Shortly we treat of Savonarola's lapse
Upon the point of εἶδος versus ἰδέα."
Did I not say 'twas only a bookish quarrel ?
Those were the very words that Lapo uttered :
He looked at one he spoke with, and the youth
Grinned. . . . Why, Laodamia, see ! your father !

Laodamia runs impetuously to Roberto Strozzi, clasping her hands.

Laodamia. O father ! father ! Save our Girolamo !

Strozzi. Girolamo ? What, your playmate Savonarola,
Son of the Duke's physician ? . . . Ah, he is grown. . . .
What then ?

Laodamia. They'll kill him ! Once he is out of sight,
Too late ! . . . They'll bring him on a bier, his face
Covered,—so white !—his breast all bleeding ; then
They'll say it was a quarrel ; no ! 'twas murder !
Ah, Girolamo, they will murder you !

Strozzi. Quarrels ? He has none : 'tis your fancy, child.

Laodamia. No : it is true ! Oh, let us fly this hour !
To Urbino,—Padua,—Venice ! Bid him come :
You he obeys.

Strozzi. You hurl your words, my daughter :
Where will your passions blow you,—aye, and others ?
Nay, do not pout : I know you true and constant.
But as for me, the only road I travel
Is—back to Florence, or to an exile's grave.
That would you hasten ?

Laodamia. Dearest father, no :
But—Girolamo——!

Strozzi. Idle chatter ! Fear not :
Or, if you will, then warn him.

Laodamia. He would smile :
" God will protect me," he would say. No, no !

Strozzi. Then warn his kindred.

Laodamia. Ah me! There is no time!

Strozzi. Softly, my daughter! There is one may help—
The Pazzi's intimate: indeed, 'tis they
Who urge the suit; what better counsellors?
You hear me? You will please me?

Laodamia [*distractedly*]. I?—Oh, my God!—
Flight is impossible; or, did we flee,
Are there not lanes and daggers everywhere?

Strozzi. See: I have thought of you alone. No rank,
No wrinkled money bag: the youth is brisk,
Handsome, his praises on the lips of all.
Not but that mating with the Strozzi lifts him:
Yet what of that? Our honours sit at peril,
Turning on Fortune's wheel: brain only rights them:
So say the Pazzi, shrewd and trusty friends.

Laodamia. Even as we quit the place the deed is done.
Alas! I am lost. There is no other way.

Strozzi. Lost? Wait until you see. One fault he has:
One only: scholar he is not: ha ha!
I have seen his book: 'tis velut aegri somnia:
Wild as a sick man's dream. But let that pass.
Here is the man to save us, say the Pazzi.—
Do I not make you happy?

Laodamia [*still musing*]. Happiness?
He said we must not seek it. Life for him,
If I could give it, and in giving be
The unacknowledged partner of his triumphs. . . .
There is nought else.

Enter Savonarola.

Strozzi. A word with you, young sir:
My daughter seeks it. *Exit Strozzi.*

Savonarola. Laodamia ?

Laodamia. Not now :
I did not call you.

Savonarola. So ! He signifies
Consent : thereto Heaven urges him ; for God—
God, who has made my soul a lonely harp
Hung in a windy place, where all the woes
Of Italy blow through and wail upon it,—
God wafted you, a White Bird, from His throne ;
And, O Laodamia, as in a dream,
I heard the seraphs of the City of God
Pealing their campanili, and crying aloud,
" Go forth, O Savonarola : save the world ! "
Sanctum fecit me, et elegit ex omni carne.
This consecration is upon me ; God
Gives thee to me as pledge.

Laodamia. Ah, Girolamo, no !
You misconceive my lord : it cannot be.

Savonarola. It is the will of Heaven.—Ah ! what is that !

A sudden clanking of chains is distinctly audible from below ; then a long cry of extreme anguish. They pause and listen. From the rear, 'Cecco Cei is heard singing.

Cei. Hail to the merry, merry month of May !
Flutter little linnets in the wild-wood spray,
Titter little loves in the shadow of the trees :
'Nozza, 'Nozza is tripping in the leas,
And the red rose blooms in the month of May.

Laodamia. Girolamo ! what was it ?

Savonarola [*groaning*]. No May ! no roses !
The only flower that bourgeons there has bloomed—
Death ! Death !

Laodamia. Girolamo !

Savonarola [*pointing excitedly to the distant revellers*].
Here they jig, they grab,
They clatter the wine-cups and majolica:
Down there the fetters clank,—rust eats their flesh,—
Black darkness aches for ever. Oh, these eyes
Strained for a glimmer! None: the dungeon reek
Swam up until I swooned. And then that voice:
"Father! Oh, Father! Can you not feel my arm?"
So! He was dying then; and now he is dead.
Laodamia, it might have been your father:
"Can you not feel my arm?" "Feel," she said,—"feel!"
"Withered," a deep voice groaned: I heard no more.
Withered, her arm—once soft and round, like yours.
Her heart is withered now.

Laodamia. I cannot bear it!

Savonarola. That sweet voice was the soul of Italy:
Out of the dark she called to me, and I
Heard, and that withered arm will I restore.
Your love. . . .

Laodamia. It cannot be—it cannot!

Savonarola. Hear me!
I swear it by that glory of your eyes:
This arm may God and the Virgin wither up,
If in this shamble of Christ's innocent lambs
I strike no blow, and break no penthouse bars,
Nor cleave a straight path through their crookedness.
This is my vow: to you the oath is sworn.

Laodamia. Yes: but now quit me! Ah, for love o' the Virgin
Quit me: we are watched.

Savonarola. God watches. I will hear
His mandate through your lips.

Laodamia. There's danger.

Savonarola. Danger ?
Have I not drunk God's pledge cup from your eyes ?
Laodamia. Oh, if you would but heed me !—Promise this :
Until I bid, you will not leave this place.
Savonarola. That, certes, I will promise.
Laodamia. Quit me now ;
And do not hope. You read my father wrongly :
The thing you wish can never be. Alas,
I fear it cannot.

Lapo approaches, bearing fruit.

Savonarola. But it shall. God wills it.
Lapo. Ah, Messer Girolamo, I intrude.

Savonarola looks to Laodamia to reply.

Laodamia [*to Lapo*]. No, Signor.
Lapo. Prithee, a melon, Signorina ?
Laodamia. I thank you.
Savonarola. Do not take it.
Laodamia. Yes, indeed :
Would Messer Savonarola have me thirst ?
Savonarola. Last night I dreamt a dream. You took a melon,
Outside all gold, inside a reek of poisons !
And woe befell you.
Laodamia. It was not Messer Lapo's.
This one is good. I thank you, Messer Lapo.
Lapo. The Signorina does me honour.
[*To Savonarola.*] Pardon !
I leave you.
Laodamia. No, I pray you do not go.
Savonarola. Heaven save you, Signorina. Fare you well.

Laodamia watches Lapo, and seeing his face is turned, looks anxiously and tenderly at Savonarola.

Laodamia. Your promise.

Savonarola. Yes: I do not leave the castle.

Seeing that he is about to go, Lapo turns affably to Savonarola.

Lapo. Ah, Signor Girolamo, it seems to me
A thousand years until we talk again.
We are both simple men: philosophy
Is mistress of our hearts.

Savonarola bows stiffly, Lapo with great politeness. Exit Savonarola.

Laodamia. He is your friend?
You talk with him? Ah, false!

Lapo. Shall I recall him?
He will assure you.

Laodamia. Indeed, and if it be so,
It is a ruse: you plot; you kill.

Lapo. More dreams
Of Messer Savonarola?

Laodamia. He does not know:
But I—I know: you cannot hide it from me.

Lapo. Think you there's aught that I would hide from you?
To you my soul is bare,—bathed in that love
Which by your father's leave I name; and though
It is but a poor philosopher who pleads,
And one it seems whom calumny defames,
Bellissima, he shall conquer, and my lord
Shall lay your hand in mine.

Laodamia. My father knows not:
He knows you not. I know. He will not force me.
Go: get you gone. Ser Lapo, I refuse you.
Go wash your hand of blood before again
You offer it to a daughter of the Strozzi.

Lapo. Ah, what is this? I pray you, Signorina!
I am an innocent man. I shed no blood:

Let him come forth who dares accuse me.—I
Do harm to no man.
Laodamia. Yes; you write a book;
You feign philosophy: your written words
Are cut-throats masked!
Lapo. Before the saints I swear,
Nought that God made these hands have ever slain.
Laodamia. Your hands, no, that needs courage; but your book——
Lapo. I pray you tell me: it is my book, you say?
How shall it harm a soul? A humble effort:
Your father's learning I do not pretend.
Howbeit, though young, I lack not my disciples:
They will defend me.
Laodamia. "Disciples" do you call them?—
Hirelings, assassins!
Lapo. The great Lord Pazzi
Is one of them.
Laodamia. Your dupe! . . . Some words of Greek—
That is the sign they know.
Lapo. Prithee . . . I ponder . . .
I was but thinking how it comes about—
This fancy of yours . . . yes, now I have a clue.
Somewhat I wrote, by chance, of one Cannetto—
Yes, that is so—I make no doubt it is . . .
Was thought to have urged the zeal of my disciples,
And caused his death,—an error,—but suppose it:
Then does it follow, if last night I wrote
Some innocent words——
Laodamia. Last night! 'Tis done already!
Leaving this place he runs upon his doom!
He shall not go: I'll warn the Duke——
Lapo. He is absent.

Laodamia. My lord de Pazzi, Montesecco—all—
I will warn them all.
Lapo. What then? You fear a plot?
Suppose it. Then these signors are involved.
Ah, Signorina, plots are stealthy vessels;
All's with the watchman when you steer by night.
Laodamia. So! he confesses!
Lapo. Nay: but if it were so,
And one were taint of treason.
Laodamia. False!
Lapo. No matter:
If I denounced him—I, the watch (suppose it):
What will these signors do? Discard my warning?
No; but as lords they'll hearken to a lady,—
Bow, and protest her friend shall go unharmed:
As statesmen—shrug, and move him from their path.
Laodamia. Yes, yes! My God!
Lapo. With just this difference:
Pray follow me: for this you needs must know:
Your protest inculpates your father: him
Also they will remove.
Laodamia. Oh, holy virgin,
Pity me! I am lost!
Lapo. Bellissima!
What would I not do for you?
Laodamia. You love me: save him!
Lapo. How save, and whom?
Laodamia. You know. Ah, why torment me?
Lapo. Nay, God forbid! Your phantasy is this:
I wrote some controversial words, which whet
The zeal of my disciples: deem you so?
Laodamia. Yes, if you will. . . . My God, we are in the net!
Lapo. Praise from your lips is sweet; and praise it is

To deem that I, a poor philosopher,
Can, with a pen stroke, prick out human lives,
Or succour them so lightly. Then indeed,
Although my chariot makes but little sound,
Foes are as offal crushed beneath the wheels.
Also, sweet lady, my love for you is fierce:
I hope your friend is not a foe to that:
You mark me, Signorina?—I humbly hope it.

Laodamia. Love without pity, so my father says,
Is dross without the gold, flame without light,—
A pest, a noisome thing.

Lapo. Ah, now you speak it,
I do recall. There were indeed some words
I wrote last night of Messer Savonarola,—
A youth of parts, if humbly I may say it,
Though like to shipwreck in the fog of dreams.
Our metaphysics differ,—I regret it,—
Our metaphysics differ, Signorina.

Laodamia. Withdraw what you have written: ah, you can!
See, I am kneeling to you. Save him!

Lapo. No:
Whatever the cost, false doctrine must be slain:
I owe allegiance to philosophy:
She is my love: you leave to me no other.

Laodamia. Oh, you are ruthless, cruel!

Lapo. Bellissima!
But if the pressure of a hand, not mine,
A lingering look of love, and not for me,
Inscribed those words of dire philosophy?
What then? Who is the ruthless one—the cruel?
Lapo? Ah, no: not he, but——

Laodamia. Signor, say:
What can I do to save him?

Lapo. Ah, most fair !
Have I not said ? Philosophy is my love :
You leave to me no other.
Laodamia. I will not wed him—
I vow I will not wed him.
Lapo. That is well.
The Strozzi's vow I trust . . . My heart ! my soul !
For you—for you alone—I would renounce
Even philosophy, and in love's sweet quarrel
Drown all these disputations. Say, sweet lady,
Can this thing be ?
Laodamia. O Virgin, succour ! . . . Yes,
Yes, I will wed you. . . . Spare him ! . . . Only that !
Lapo. Now by the Mass, I swear it.
Laodamia. Save him ! Go !
Lapo. Yes, time is urgent.
Kisses her hand and is about to go.
Laodamia. Else——
Lapo. Addio !
Laodamia. No stay !
You think me a child. I was. I am no longer.
Now, prithee, listen. My lord was wont to say
My moods were wayward as my loosened tresses.
Ah, Messer Lapo, now you knit, you knot them :
By the hair you hold me : tear it out,—I care not !
But singe a hair of his—be warned ! They say
A woman's locks once turned to deadly reptiles.
Lapo. I take the risk. Be sure I lack not skill
To tame Medusa. . . . Basta ! Let that be.
Summon your Messer Savonarola : hold him,
While, as his guardian angel, I prepare
To lead him home in safety. Have no fear :
You, by a look, a sign, a secret meeting,

Even now may slay him,—you and no one else.
For me, I wish him well; but my disciples
Are jealous of my honour: they avenge it,—
Ah, swiftly! Wherefore, would you spare his life
Then merely kill his love; and that, I judge,
Will die not hardly; he, forsooth, being made
For heavenly, I for earthly nuptials. That
In time you'll know, albeit now you hate me.
Addio, Bellissima; I do your will. *Exit.*

Livia [*who now approaches, having watched at a distance*].
So! it is settled. 'Faith, and one would think,
To see your looks and his, a young man's love
Will gobble gall like julep.

Laodamia. Do not talk.
Bid Girolamo hither.

Livia. Child! What next?

Laodamia. Instantly, Aunt.

Livia. Pray, what will Lapo say?

Laodamia. He wills it.

Livia. Shame! A Strozzi's daughter
And chattering, hoyden-like, with popolani!
If that is all, your father will dismiss him.
In my day brides were modest.

Laodamia. Call him, Aunt.

Livia. Oh, if you will. [*To Savonarola.*] Ah, Messer Girolamo,
Lesson us pray: we pine to hear your wisdom;
Merely to talk with you, I tell my niece,
Makes her illustrious. As for me, pray pardon.
Poor Padre—there he is again: so lonely;
Adored in Florence, no one knows him here.
Indeed I must befriend him: pray you, pardon.
Curtseys. Exit.

Savonarola. A waking dream I had. This revel died :
The plangent organ, and the sobbing viol
Changed to the plash of water, and the sea
Bore many barques, and wanton crews therein,
Men and bad women, blown on fickle winds,
Unwitting of the tide that swept them down
Swiftly toward sunken rocks. Whence eagerly
I paced the shore and cried,—Ho mariners, come !
Trust not your shallops to the gliding wave :
Great is my galley—space is there for all,
And lo afar the Islands of the Blest !
And many joined the ship, whose prow was set
Swerveless through flood and gale to where the pillars
Of Hercules loom, and, therebeyond, that Isle
Whose King crowns all our travail with great joy
In Loveliness fresh-found through endless time.
Freely they rowed, and, bowing to their oars,
Sang " Viva Gesu, nostro re " ; and lo
From every star a saint leant out, and shone,
And listened. . . . O my beacon-star, but you
Lean not, nor listen. All my dream is told
To a wild dream in your eyes. . . .

Laodamia. O for some words !
Think, Messer Girolamo, I——

Savonarola. Not " Messer " :
You have not called me so.

Laodamia. We have been too free—
Not mindful of the debt we owe our kindred.

Savonarola. Our kindred—yes, our Father, and His Son,
Who in the shadowy vastness of the night
Builded the Heavens, where congregate the stars,
In brotherhood ; and from the lowly stall
Foreshowed on Earth that home where all are kin :

Laodamia, yes; let us be mindful
Of debts we owe our kindred. . . . Ah, so pale?
You with the angel's wisdom,—I instruct you?
Nay, let me kneel to you, and see Heaven open
Out of the flashing of your dusky eyes.

Laodamia. No, for I am not good, like you.

Savonarola. Not good?
There is none good or evil, but as sap
Is drawn up by the blossoms from the earth,
So we draw life from God; and you the most,
Whose flower is fairest. . . . Sweet, and so I dreamt
There, in my galleon, was a vacant seat,
Abaft, and, from the hovering aureole,
I knew it for my pilot's. . . . Still so cold?
No eyes aglow, as once, to kindle mine,—
What change is this? . . . Laodamia, speak!

Laodamia. Help me to say it, saints! I would not hurt you:
O pray interpret for me, Signor! 'Tis
Of love you speak. Remember, I am a Strozzi.

Savonarola. You mean our ranks are not alike: you mean
This brag of lineage, and the devil's dower
Of gold divides us. No, Laodamia,
It sunders not us two.

Laodamia [*breathlessly*]. Yes—that I mean:
Scorn me! For his sake who is more to me
Than life, I bear it.

Savonarola. Ah! [*A pause.*]

Laodamia [*faintly*]. Forgive!

Savonarola. You falter;
You droop your eyes. Now look on me. You dare not.
Who is this other?

[*She clasps her hands and is silent.*]

By all the hours we passed,

Soul bared to soul, nourishing noble aims
As with the life-blood of each other's love,
I claim the right of knowledge.
Laodamia. Oh, forgive!
Girolamo, I am betrothed!—Think kindly of me:
I cannot speak. . . . Oh! . . .
Savonarola [*fiercely*]. God! And what is this?
And so they say that Satan, when he fell,
Bore masks of angels' faces out of Heaven,
And, to make devils of the sons of man,
Clapped them upon the wantons!

He paces the floor in agitation; then, pausing, looks at her again. The strumming of a lute is heard in the rear.

False? No, no!
This riddle has a key; or else. . . . My God!

Enter Cei with Dolfo. They encounter Cini.

Cei. Sciagurato — halt! Art drunk? What, no? For shame.
Dolfo, and I, Mazzinghi—all the saints
Are drunk this half hour. Pretty 'Nozza laughs—
Ha! the white lotus! How her bosom swells!
Mam, mam, mam!
She will ogle any lamb,
Any grey, any green agnel-lo,
Any clown, any punchinel-lo,
Be it coram, be it clam,—
Oh, the pretty devil's dam!—
If his horns are tipped with yel-low.
Savonarola. Ah!
Cei [*to Cini*]. Thanks to the holy apostle Lapo,
This lamb bleeds ducats [*chinking the coins in his wallet*].

Bah ! Thou greenhorn, scour !
I am thy pimp, thy marigold.

Enter Lapo.

God shield thee, Lapo !
Thou art a saint.

Cei reels off with Dolfo, bowing grotesquely to Lapo. Cini with them. Lapo bows to Laodamia.

Lapo. Bellissima, all is well.
[*To Savonarola.*] Messer, by your leave—your company, I pray.
My road lies toward your home, but through a byway
Quiet for converse.

Savonarola. Mine to a convent leads. . . .
Farewell, Laodamia. God will pardon,—
And why not I ? . . . Farewell . . . I suffocate !—
Pure air and peace, and one straight path to walk in. . . .
[*To Lapo.*] Signor, I come.

Exit with Lapo.

Laodamia [*wildly*]. " God pardon ? " Where is God ? . . .
He—he is gone !—I think there is no God !

ACT II

MANY YEARS LATER.

SCENE I.—*Pisa: A Street; in front of the Palazzo Strozzi.*

Enter two Citizens.

1st Citizen. Besmeared with honey and stung to death with wasps,—
Such, Messer, is the state of Pisa since
This vast French army quartered in the town.

2nd Citizen. Yet if they free us from the yoke of Florence,
We'll suffer all, and gladly.

1st. Cit. Know ye the news?

2nd Cit. That yesterday young Piero, Prince of Florence,
Lest France might take his city, promised ours
In gift, and with it ten score thousand florins.

1st Cit. True, but to-day a monk of mighty visage
Entered our city riding on an ass,
Spokesman for Florence in the Prince's stead,
Whose bargain he makes bold to tear in pieces;
And if he bend the French king to his will,
Like Holy Christ they say he'll ride to Florence
With palms to strew his way.

2nd Cit. Now, by the Mass,
Kings are tough metal for a monk to bend.

1st Cit. Natheless, of this same Frate tales are current
That augur strangely. He it was foretold
The French king's coming as a second Cyrus
To purge the sins of Rome.
2nd Cit. A fatter city
That than your Florence.
1st Cit. More gold to sack, pardee:
The shortest way to purge a city's sins.
Wherefore 'tis feared the king may take the bait;
The more that, like his sire, King Louis, Charles
Is superstitious, and the monk works marvels.
2nd Cit. What is his name?
1st Cit. Savonarola, but
The people style him Frate, as in love.
2nd Cit. Savonarola? Strange! Some ten years since,
Lodging with one called Lapo in Ferrara,
I met a youth so named whom Lapo knew;
And there is one interprets for the French
Has this same Lapo's very pitch and parlance,
Though little to recall his countenance.
But Lapo perished in the Pazzi plot—
Unless belike he saved his lissom neck,
Selling his friends. Know ye the man I speak of?
Wears a Venetian doublet.
1st Cit. Supple gait?
Walks safe amid a guard of halberdiers?
2nd Cit. The same. He caters for the Frenchmen's rapine:
Is there a burgher owns a black-eyed daughter,
Fine cellars, parchments, gold or plate or pictures,
Lo, Sir Venetian Doublet, chalk in hand,
Scores on the door a coat of arms—and straight
A French lord billets there, and clears the treasure!
. . . So ho! And here he comes!

Enter Lapo, clad shabbily, altered in appearance, and wearing a beard. With him is a guard of French halberdiers. They pause before the door of the Palazzo Strozzi, and Lapo draws a fleur-de-lys upon the lintel.

1st Cit. The fleur-de-lys !

2nd Cit. He marks the Strozzi Palace for King Charles of France.

1st Cit. Gold—books—fair daughter—he serves his client well :
No house yields richer plunder than the Strozzi's.

2nd Cit. Lapo, by the Mass ! I swear it is the man !

SCENE II.—*The Strozzi Palace : within. A Library. Enter Lapo with French halberdiers. The door is flung open angrily by a porter of the palace, who encounters Lapo without at first seeing his companions.*

Porter. Knave, wouldst thou pass a Strozzi's gate unbid ?
Seizes him by the throat.

Lapo. Loose me ! I am French !

Porter. We'll teach thee Pisan manners !
The soldiers interpose : the porter steps back and surveys them.
Plague on the sorry hound : he leads an army !
Bowing to Lapo ironically.
Sir King of France, I yield : the battle is yours :
Your first great victory ! Viva l'oriflamme !

Halberdiers. Vive l'oriflamme ! Hurrah !

Lapo. Sir, you speak truly :
For, since they crossed the Alps, the French have seen
Nought of the Italians but some flying heels.

Porter [*looking at the boots of the French soldiers, copied from those of their misshapen king*].

Humph ! and that's better than a Frenchman's toes.

Lapo with an officer examines the apartment.

What seek ye ? Wine ? or victuals ? Here's the cellar :
Ye don't drink parchment, eh ? 'Tis all ye'll get,
Hustling in here. . . . These are our friends, forsooth !

Lapo [*turning to the porter*].

Amico, I interpret for these Messieurs, being
A Pisan, though from Venice : as you see,
My hose is somewhat travelled——

Porter. Bah ! A Pisan !
Eating his words,—so hungry ! Don't tell me !
I know ye, fellow : a hanger on, a tramp :
They neither toil, nor spin, yet are not lilies.

Lapo. Amico, nay, I am an honest man :
I toil, I spin.

Porter. Va ! Like the spider, rascal :
He spins i' the dirty corners, and a broom's
His medicine. Va !

Lapo [*drawing out money*]. Messer, the warps of Fate
Twist us to other than we are. You, friend,
Were born to rule as Castellan of Pisa !
Your stubborn worth deserves a fortress' keys :
But Fate has made you flunkey ! So with me :
I, Sir, was born Philosopher : this brain [*touching his forehead*]
Might rear that dandled puling babe, the world,
Out of its paps, its nursery tales, its godlings,
Into the cognizance of Power and Empire :
But, 'faith, it coos to its monks and mammies still,
And I must spin like other folk—well, no :
Hardly like others. . . . Basta ! To urgent matters !
These are from his most Christian Majesty

The King of France,—his bodyguard ; he comes
For succour to the oppressed of Italy,
As prophesied. A lady of the house,—
If I mistake not, daughter of the Strozzi,—
Drops the money into the Porter's hand.
Your pardon,—is she maid or mistress ?
Porter. Signors,
Be seated : you are gentles, as I see.
A soldier offers him wine from a flask. He drinks and bows to the Frenchmen.
Grazie ! Your health ! . . . You put a question, Sir :
As I may say, the riddle of the house.
Signora, Signorina, as you please :
Maiden though married, Nencia swears. She knows,
Being my lady's woman. But, say I,
Where is the husband ? Some say,—long since dead,
Hanged with the Pazzi on the marriage day ;
Some,—living, and she drove the bridegroom from her,
Forced to the bond, yet mighty free of spirit.
For sure enough her girdle hides a dagger
That once she called " her friend " ; though trust me, Sir,
It is a gentle lady, sweet as jasmine ;
And many take her fragrance,—none may pluck her.
Lapo [*aside*].
Plucked, natheless, shall she be,—worn in the cap,—
Tossed where they drop my ducats on the march ;
Or else—— [*To an officer.*]
Pucelle, mais mariée, comme je dis.
Distes à sa majesté que tout l'attend :
Il est bienvenu.
Officer. Ha ! par Saint Denys :
[*Sings.*] Ci gist Margot, la gentil' damoiselle,
Qu'a deux maris, et encore est pucelle.

A bell rings without.

Porter. It is my lady. Hide!

Draws an arras: a small private chapel is disclosed. Lapo and the soldiers conceal themselves. Enter Roberto Strozzi and his daughter Laodamia.

Laodamia [*lifts a gauntlet, left on the table*].
Tommaso! What is this?

Porter. The French, Signora.
They asked for my lord and bade me say their King
"Honours the Signor Strozzi with a visit":
That was the message.

Laodamia. Father, see—your books!
Hide them, Tommaso: help me: quick, I pray you.

Strozzi [*pacing the room in agitation, while the books are removed from the shelves and piled on the table*].
The mongrel monarch,—the mouthing jackanapes!
(Softly! That tome is worth a prince's ransom.)
Honours us, does he? Lucifer filches souls;
A book's a soul's quintessence: thieves of books
Out-devil devils!—Let him dare it!

Clenches his fist toward the door.

Voice [*from without*]. Way
For his most Christian Majesty, King Charles.

Enter Charles VIII., attended only by Guillaume Briçonnet. He bows to Strozzi and Laodamia, who kneel.

Charles. Signor, I greet you. Rise, ma belle Italienne:
And you, my lord; thanks for your welcome. Sit.
A goodly house! Et qu'elle est belle Madonna!
The Signor is pleased to make this place our hostel?

Strozzi. All the king asks in honour, that we yield.

Charles. What is this learned litter? Madonna reads?

Laodamia. No sire; my father's pastime, else, i' faith,

Looks significantly at her father.

Would I not burn them, such the dust they make !

Charles [*patting her familiarly on the cheek*]. Ah, wicked !

Strozzi. Aye, an old man's bagatelles :
Tommaso, clear the board ; his Majesty
Needs entertainment.

Charles. No, by St. Denys !
Let be : I feed on this.

Seizes Laodamia's hand and kisses it.

Briçonnet. Sire, it is said
The sheepskins of the Strozzi well might back
The Argo's golden fleece. Your Amboise Castle
Is poor in learned treasure.

Charles. Tut, good Guillaume !
Where is the man with eyes for sallow parchment
When lilies are afield ?

Puts his arm round her waist : she avoids him.

Briçonnet. So ! Then this signor
May with one treasure ransom all the rest ?
Is it so, my liege ?

Strozzi. I pray you spare us insult.

Charles. Bah ! 'Tis a very Jew, this Briçonnet !
Madonna, thou shalt teach him : comme ça,— comme ça !

Raps Briçonnet on the knuckles, laughing loudly.

Va donc ! thou kestrel !—Thus he crooks his talons :
Ha, voilà ! So !

Leans over the table and claws the books toward him with a ferocious grimace.

But have no care, my lord :
Madonna's eyes are all the books I read.
So fair, my lord, you bound this book of love,
Amboise shall have no other.

Strozzi [*rising indignantly*]. God in Heaven !

Has the most Christian Majesty a blacker soul
Than Turk, or vile Moresco ?—Take all these,—
Snatch all these gleanings of an old man's life.
Yea, lift this latch and grasp a thousand realms.
For this, O Xerxes, is no Hellespont,—
This bridge no flood engulfs : its piers are set
Deep in immortal spirits ; underneath
Wash the dark ages : thoughts with wingèd feet
Flash o'er this bridge 'twixt antique times and ours,
And light new highways for thy soul to tread.
Nay, if you will, go subjugate all lands,
From Lebanon to the Herculean Strait,—
Hold them you shall not : realm on realm eludes you,—
Slips from your grasp like sand thro' open fingers ;
But these enlarge your frontiers by the leagues
Travelled by minds unnumbered, countless years,—
A thousand volumes, each a kingdom won ;
A thousand kingdoms of the soul of man ;
A thousand realms to your one realm annexed :—
Steal, if you will, all these, but not our honour !

Laodamia. Father, he dare not touch them,—no, nor me :
I have a friend,—behold ! my bosom hides it :
Draws a small dagger from her breast.
Ere this it saved me.—See ! I do not flinch !
Stabs her arm.

Strozzi [*with alarm*]. My daughter !

Charles. Ha ! You are pierced ! The fair white flesh !
Mon dieu ! Does it not hurt ? Ho there, a leech !——

Laodamia [*binding the wound*]. No sire, no leech for me : but, if you will,
Call one to heal my father's wounded pride,—
Son of St. Louis and of Charlemagne,
Call from your breast the kingly chivalry :

That is the potent leech. For me, my lord,
I did but prove how little I should fear,
Rather than take dishonour from your hands,
To prick my heart, and brand upon your brow
A shame no leech can heal.

Charles. Now, pasques-dieu, Guillaume!
Here is a stalwart quean! What shall we think?
There is that tag of the army, that Omniscience,
That draggled unctuous scullion, he who knows
All things and tongues, all politics and persons,
Save how to help himself,—yet helps himself
To all things: what shall we think, I say?
He comes from her,—he told us all about her:
Aye, for the sight of her the other day
So conquered us——

Briçonnet. And kings are worth the conquest,—
So mark you that, Madonna.

Charles. He comes, I say,
And brings us word from her, "The King is welcome."
Now, pasques-dieu, Guillaume, what are we to think?

Laodamia speaks earnestly aside with her father. Enter an officer who speaks aside to Briçonnet.

Briçonnet. Think, sire? Why, a pretty actress knows
How coyness quickens passion. As for him,
The old huddle's in his dotage. . . . Pray your pardon,
New embassy from Florence——

Charles. Bah! your Piero!
Is not that partridge plucked enough already?
Pisa, Leghorn, Sarzana, Librefatta,—
N'est-ce pas assez? Four apples from one twig!
("Countess of Pisa,"—hey, ma belle Italienne,
How like you that for a title?) Piero! Ha!
You know one Piero de Medici, Signor?

Son of Lorenzo, and ruler now in Florence ?
He is a poltroon.—Bid him enter, Guillaume.
Briçonnet. Not Piero, by your leave. We plucked him, certes,
And Florence, I hear, is like to wring his neck :
This time, a gamer cock : the prophet Jerome.
Charles. He who foretold my coming ?
Briçonnet. Aye, Sire—he,
Prior of St. Mark's, and chief man now in Florence.
The mob doff hats, and tiptoe for a glance.
Charles. Guillaume, I'd give my purse to see a prophet.
Briçonnet. As for their prophecies, that stuff, my liege,
They juggle from confessional, like the clown
Your kerchief from a box.
Charles. Bah, fool, confess :
Thou art a very knave in bud,—in flower
A cardinal.
Briçonnet. My liege, I hope to be.
Charles. Thou shalt. Thou art the greatest thief unfrocked,—
A churchman born. . . .
[*To Strozzi.*] Didst hear that prophecy ?
Strozzi. The Frate's sermons ever made a stir :
That more than most : indeed the people said,
Preaching, a halo crowned him. Say, my daughter :
What was the text ?
Laodamia. " Gladius super terram
Cito et velociter," father.
Charles. Ah, Madonna !
You know their Latin ? . . . Guillaume, what does it mean ?
Briçonnet. Swiftly and soon, upon the earth a sword.
Charles. Our sword, good Guillaume ?
Briçonnet. Aye.
Charles. When said he that ?
Strozzi. Say, child !

Laodamia. Was it not three years since, my father,
Before Lorenzo's death ?

Strozzi. Aye, that was it.

Charles. Pasques-dieu ! And whose confessions taught him that ?
Thou art an ass, Briçonnet. Three years since
Didst *thou* know we should march to Italy ?

Briçonnet. No, Sire. [*A noise without.*]

Charles. Nor I. . . . Who clamours at the door ?
Guillaume, go see.

Voice [*shrieking from without*]. Not fire nor fiends shall stop me !

Briçonnet opens the door, and the Greyfriar, Fra Mariano, forces his way in, grappled from behind by two soldiers. Briçonnet stamps, and to the alarm of the Strozzi, the halberdiers issue from the curtained chapel, and take their places around the King for his protection. Lapo remains in hiding. Fra Mariano, puffed, bloated, and purple with excitement, throws himself at Charles's feet.

Charles. Up man ! Thou grovellest. . . .
[*To Strozzi.*] Is this the prophet ?

Strozzi. One Mariano, Sire.

Mariano [*rising pompously and with uplifted hands*].
Omnipotent Jove,
All holy saints, and tutelary stars,
Shake from the coma of Aldebaran
Conjunctive blessings on this regal head !

Rolls his eyes about the room ridiculously and throws himself into an attitude of deprecation.

Charles. Guillaume, the man is drunk.

Mariano. What folk are these ?

Worthy of thee, august and astral monarch ?

Briçonnet. Thy business, fellow.

Mariano. Behold a ravening wolf
Prowls in sheep's clothing : majesty, beware !

Charles. Ha, comme c'est drôle !

Briçonnet. Truce o' thy tropes : speak plainly.

Mariano. Fra Girolamo, dire implacable foe
Of the holy father, our most pious Pope——

Charles. The prophet, Guillaume ?

Briçonnet. Doubtless.

Charles [*aside*]. That is well :—
We also are the Borgia's foe : eh, Guillaume ?

Mariano. Cursed by genethliac omen from his birth,
Cub of black Saturn, cacotropic, vile,
Iconoclast, false prophet, blasphemous,
Raising his voice gradually to a bawl.
Out of whose mouth there issue fire and stench,—
Apostate, heresiarch, and demagogue,
Imp, fiend, abortion of the bottomless pit,
Satan incarnate——
Stammers and grows incoherent with rage.

Charles. Pasques-dieu ! Comme c'est drôle !
Drink is given to Mariano, who smacks his lips ; and, recovering, pauses, rolls his eyes about the room, then resumes in the didactic tone.

Mariano. Now, having proved the wickedness of this monk,
I pass to instances : as videlicet.
He is the foe of princes. Ludovic,
The Lord of Milan, your ally, he baffled.
Prince Bentivoglio from the sacred rostrum
He put to shame, and but for Satan's aid
[*crosses himself*] His life were forfeit.

Briçonnet [*to Strozzi*]. Is this true, my lord ?

Strozzi. My daughter, say.
Laodamia. The Duke employed assassins,
Who shrank before the Frate's gaze, and fled.
Mariano. Quo cognoscimus ipsum adparuisse Satanam :
Whereas he escaped by showing the evil eye——
Starts back as if at sight of a reptile.
Alarum ! Let him be burnt for use of witchcraft !
Ha ! Do I err ? Canst prick a hole in that ?
No ? Then do justice. Apprehend him, Sire !
Raze out this blot upon our holy church !
Arise, St. George, and trample on this dragon !
Rolls his eyes about as if for approbation. Briçonnet shrugs ; the King grins. With a gesticulation of vexation he proceeds.
Tut ! There's no law nor justice in the land ! . . .
Lorenzo the Magnificent, moreover,
This impious Frate dared to reprobate,
Denying (opprobrious wretch !) that gracious prince
The Church's absolution for his sins :
And he a prince ! Lift, O thou son of Louis,
Lift, illustrissimo, thy hand and strike !
And when they warned this hydra from the city,
Insolently to the Prince he hissed these words :
" I stay : thou goest ! "
Charles. Et alors ?
Laodamia. The Prince
Perished unshriven.
Charles. Enough, good fellow,—go !
[*Aside.*]
Cut-throats before him quail ; he prophesies ;
Works miracles, slaying princes with a word !—
Now, by our Lady, 'tis a dangerous monk !
We thank thee, father.

Mariano [*loftily waving his hands*]. Sire, I eschew reward.
To save the King suffices. . . . Mightiest Jove,
All holy saints, and thou, Aldebaran——

Briçonnet. Out, sirrah! *Fra Mariano is hustled out.*

Charles. Do you know this man, my lord?

Strozzi. A rival preacher, once the vogue in Florence.

Charles. Does not the prophet loom more large and terrible?

Briçonnet. Aye, certes.

Charles. Shall we not have this prophet, then,
On *our* side, Guillaume?

Briçonnet. Aye, Sire: while it serves us.

Charles. Pasques-dieu! I would not miss the sight of him,—
Not for a province, Guillaume! Bid him enter.

Briçonnet speaks to an officer. Other soldiers from without crowd into the room to lend state to the King. There is an expectant pause. Enter Savonarola clad as a Blackfriar. The populace press to the door to see him.

Briçonnet. Father, your knees! It is the King of France.

Savonarola. No, friend; when on the errand of my King,
To Him alone I bow.

Charles. Aye, aye, good father!
Stand upon no punctilio. You are welcome.
We hear you work great miracles.

Savonarola approaches the King and holds a crucifix to his lips. The King falls on his knees and kisses it.

Savonarola. O King,
Bronze from the earth am I, wherethrough God blows,
A trump to call his people to repentance.
Whereas the land of Italy is filled
From end to end with wickedness and lust,
Whereas Christ's Vicar, his sons and concubines

Sit clad in scarlet, and the dye is blood
Wrung from the flock he shepherds,—God has spoken :
" Swiftly and soon, a sword upon the earth !
My temples shall be purgèd and My house
Swept of the traffickers, who toss men's souls
Like dice upon My tables."
Charles. Ha, mon père,
You speak of the holy father. Say they truly,
Did not this Borgia buy the papal crown
With gold that broke the back of mules a-many ?
Savonarola. Aye, God beholds it, King !
Charles. What said we, Guillaume ?
Also he has, by the year, for prisoning Djem,
Foe of the Empire of the Turk, a bribe
Of forty thousand ducats from the Soldan.
À bas ce Borgia ! 'Twas my father's right,
And mine !
Savonarola [*terribly*]. Thou play the henchman to the Turk ?
Charles. Pardon ! I spoke in haste.
Savonarola. What dost thou, King ?
Art thou that Cyrus sent from God, and thou,—
Thou viest with that Iscariot, him who sits
In Peter's chair, and sells his Lord for silver,
And with the price gives banquets to his harlots ?
Charles. Absolve me, father.
Savonarola. Thou—what dost thou, King ?
Thou art the Lord's anointed, and behold
Thou and thy men seduce, destroy and plunder.
Charles. Guillaume, command that all the army takes
Is purchased or restored.
Briçonnet. Sire ! But our treasury——
Charles. Art thou the King, Briçonnet, or am I ?
Savonarola. Djem shalt thou liberate.

Charles. I will, and gladly.
Savonarola. And punish Ludovic of Milan.
Briçonnet. Sire !
Savonarola. He wears the crown of Galeazzo, whom
He poisoned.
Briçonnet. Our sole ally,—remember that !
Savonarola. The God of Justice is your sole ally.
Briçonnet. He gives us gold and passage.
Savonarola. Beware, O Levite !
Out of the dark one cried to thee for aid :
" Succour me, stranger ! "—" Orsù ! Let him cry !
I stop for none ! "—Thou fool, then go thy way :
He that cried out for succour was thy soul :
On, on thy body hurried to its grave,
Thy soul was left to perish.
Charles. Briçonnet,
Thou art the Levite : [*To Savonarola*] not I, but he, good father :
We pass not by ; we succour Italy.
Savonarola. Know, furthermore, whereas the tyrant's son,
Piero hath betrayed to thee the towns,
Pisa, Leghorn, Sarzana and Librefatta,
Fief of the city of Florence, these shalt thou
Hold as in trust to yield them back to Florence,
And swear it on the altar in our Dome.
Charles. That will I, father.
Briçonnet. Sire !
Charles. Silence, thou upstart !
Dost think that I, the King of France, must burn
Plunged into hell, lest thou shouldst singe thy whiskers ?
Savonarola. Be as a guest in Florence, harming none ;
For in that town God's might is manifest.
Charles. Guillaume, we'll be that city's firm ally.
Savonarola. God is our sole ally : if He is thine,

Then shall the city be thy strength : for there
God bids me garrison with His angels, Truth,
Freedom and Justice, every living soul,
That, from the city's vantage ground, the earth
May yet be conquered for the King of Kings.
For lo, a great cry goes up unto Heaven :
How long, O Lord, how long ? By day and night,
Cutthroats and panders stalk the streets of Rome,
Paid by thy priests. On every crime the Pope
Has set his signet : rapine, simony,
Incest and fraud : " Sin, O my sons," he saith :
" Sin, and buy pardon, and endow my sins."—
These things, O King, shalt thou avenge.

Charles. So will I.

Savonarola. Yet injure not the Pope. As man he errs,
As Pope he cannot err. Or if as Pope
He errs, then Pope he is not. Call a Council.
Nothing in haste ; but hold the sword of God,
As in the dream that came to me from Heaven :
" Swiftly and soon a sword upon the earth !
My temples shall be purgèd and My house,
Swept of the traffickers who toss men's souls
Like dice upon My altars."

Charles [*rising in excitement and drawing his sword*].
By St. Louis,
This sword shall purge the church, and Rome and Naples !
Thence will we march to stay the lustful Turk !
A Labarum is the Oriflamme of France !

Officers and Soldiers [*rising and drawing their swords*].
A Labarum is the Oriflamme of France !

Savonarola [*after the clamour has subsided*].
Charles, ere thou slay the lustful Turk abroad,
Look in thy breast, and slay him there.

Charles. Mon père ?

Savonarola. Wrong thou no woman, Charles.

Charles [*with averted head*]. So help me, Virgin !

Savonarola. If thou remember, God remembers thee :
It thou forget, then in thine hour of trouble,
Thou, too, shalt be forgotten. Farewell, King.

Charles. Thy blessing, Father !

Savonarola. Benedicat te et gladium tuum Omnipotens Deus, Pater, et Filius, et Spiritus Sanctus. Amen.

All. Amen !

Savonarola kneels in prayer, as Charles rises and, bowing to Strozzi, silently files out with his retinue. Enter Valori eagerly. Savonarola rises.

Valori. Luck to us, Frate ! God has bared his arm !
The city has risen, the Medici flies to Venice :
" The People ! The People ! Let the tyrants die ! "
Sounds through the streets of Florence, and there withal
" Evviva Cristo ! Evviva,—Evviva Frate ! "
Thus all you prophesied has come to pass :
The republic is acclaimed : the City casts
To the winds its tyrants, and for King takes Christ.

He impetuously seizes Savonarola's hands.

Savonarola. Florence ! O Florence, City of the King,
Lift up your heads, O ye gates ;
Yea lift them up, ye everlasting doors :
And the King of Glory shall come in ! . . .
I also have news : the King will spare the city ;
Pisa, Leghorn, Sarzana, Librefatta,
He holds in trust, and vows it on the altar ;
His arms are pledged to fight our holy cause :
This I commanded in the name of God.

Valori. Frate, you have saved the city: it is yours:
You hold it in the hollow of your palm!

Savonarola. Aye! as the Host to lay upon His altar!

Valori. An omen. As I rode, a hurricane blew,
And the last leaves of the Autumn filled the air:
Ghosts of the vanquished evil, legions spent,
Homeward we ride and trample them to earth;
Then shall we plant the new tree Liberty.
Addio! I bear the news. Heaven prosper thee!

Exit. Savonarola goes to the altar in the private chapel and kneels. Exit Strozzi. Laodamia remains. She draws near to him. He rises.

Laodamia. Father!

Savonarola. My daughter?

Laodamia. You have saved us.

Savonarola. Thank
Not me, but Heaven. [*Suddenly recognising her*] Madonna; thou?

Laodamia. You know me?

Savonarola. So! . . . And a great wind out of Heaven blows back
The pages of our book of life, to gloss
Dark hours with bright, and point the hand of God!

Laodamia. Your eyes accuse me, father.

Savonarola. No, my daughter:
The Master-Painter razed that picture out.

He turns the pages of a gospel and becomes absorbed.

Laodamia. Then I may speak. You thought me false; I seemed so:
Oh, but methinks you might divine the cause.
Is it then false to buy the life you love
Paying your own?

Savonarola [*reading from a book and giving no heed to her*].
Qui sine peccato est, primus lapidem mittat :
He who is sinless, let him first cast the stone.

Laodamia. O Girolamo, I think you have not guessed !

Savonarola. You speak in riddles. Daughter, I must go.

Laodamia. Not yet ! . . . Ah, true : " He razed that picture out ! "
We are as shapes that fill another canvas.

Savonarola. The ways of God are strange : since last we met
What deserts have I travelled ! and this house,
Your husband's, is my Pisgah : Italy
Lies at my feet redeemed.

Laodamia. I have no husband.

Savonarola. He of Ferrara,—does he live no more ?

Laodamia. I do not know ; I care not. If the Church
Call him my husband, it is false, I say.
My husband is a memory ;—that dies not.

Savonarola. My daughter, it is not well that we discourse.
You have a kinsman with us at St. Mark's :
Young Alessandro Strozzi, have you not ?

Laodamia. Yes, father.

Savonarola. From him I will enquire of you.
Florence expects me now : may God be with you.
Farewell.

Laodamia. Stay ! Oh, you do not understand.
Father, I loved you all the while,—and him
I hated.

Savonarola. Ah ! . . . Not so you spoke of old.

Laodamia. I spoke to kill your love : why not myself ?
'Tis dead ! I beat my brow upon its tomb !
Pitiless, pitiless love of Heaven ! Not hate
Is half as cruel !

Savonarola. No, my daughter,—no !

Memories there are which, though we bury them
Fathoms beneath our lonely cells, rise up,
Smiling with sad wild faces on our change. . . .
Christ's love is better. I have said too much.
Oh, if you loved me and were lured away,
Daughter, His love consoles. In Him we yet
Are one. . . . Farewell!

Laodamia. Have I not saved your life?
You shall not go! This hour at least is mine.
Ah! you were dead that night. . . . To espouse a Strozzi,—
That was his plot; and you were on his path. . . .
I begged your life: the price was mine. I gave it.
Yes, but once you were safe, his blood had paid it:
For see! This steel!

Draws the stiletto from her bosom.

Savonarola [*with horror*]. You killed him?

Laodamia. No: he fled.
Snakes are not lions: I have not seen him since.

Savonarola. Daughter, explain! Why did you veil the truth?

Laodamia. From you? I must. My eyes, my lips, my hands,
He tied them all,—a dagger at your breast.
One word had killed you,—even one glance of Love.
What could I do? What but destroy your Love?
O Girolamo, I loved you so!—I loved you!
Now will you fling me from you,—kill me again,—
Stone me with pious saws and frigid pardons,—
Me who for your sake died so many times?

Savonarola. Alas, my daughter, what is this you tell me?

Laodamia. I would not speak, but—Oh! I cannot bear it!

Savonarola. My best beloved! Laodamia! What have I done?

My God ! My God ! [*vehemently*] Go daughter, leave me !
I beseech you, leave me !

Laodamia [*tenderly*]. Leave you, dear Girolamo ?

Savonarola [*with fiercer vehemence*]. Yes, yes ! or pray !
Kneel so ! [*Kneeling.*]

Christ ! Holy Virgin !
Look on us ! Pity us ! Send me thy temptation,—
Thine on the mount, all kingdoms of the world,
And all their glory,—tempt my heart with those :
Not this ! Not this ! . . . Oh, hast Thou brought me here,
Painfully, to this conquest,—me, O God,
Warring against the license of Thy Priests :
My foot upon this Pisgah : then to plunge
Headlong, the whole world slipping in my fall ? . . .
Oh, God, Thou knowest how dearly we have loved :
" Two souls in the world alone with Thee," we said :
Why might it never be,—my God, oh, why ? . . .
And now the hard gain of my years seems loss,
And she the only gain ! . . . Oh, snatch me from her,
Take her, thou passionless Love, thou only Good,—
Upon Thine everlasting arms we fall :
Save her ! Save me ! Save Italy, O God !

He rises, lifts her hand to his lips, then speaks hoarsely.

Christ keep you, daughter !

Laodamia. Will you leave me so ?

Savonarola. Do you not see the years heaped up between us ?
And all the prayer that mounts up to this triumph ?
One slip, and then it topples ! Oh, my daughter,
" Triumph " I call it : Florence now is mine,—
Reclaimed for Christ,—soon Italy,—the world !
But is it triumph ?
I trod, I trampled all this arduous way

Upon your aching heart. Forgive. Farewell.
There is no more to say.

Exit.

Laodamia [*dazed*]. "No more!" "Farewell!"

She stands rigid. Lapo issues from behind the arras. She gives a cry of alarm, and then collects herself, facing him with courage, but without recognising him.

Lapo [*bowing profoundly*]. Fear not, Signora. I am no banditto.

Laodamia. Tommaso!

Lapo. Do not call: he does not hear.
Signora, I seek some private words with you.

Laodamia. What right have you to intrude? I know you not.

Lapo [*aside*]. Clearly she does not. [*To Laodamia*] Love for him you spoke with,—
Love for the Frate makes us kin, Signora.
Do not suspect me. There were reasons—Basta!
Let this suffice: I hid to save the Frate.

Laodamia. I think the Frate needs no aid from us.
Withdraw, sir: and if indeed you are his friend,
Do not report our meeting: though, be sure,
I take no shame from it.

Lapo. Trust me, fair lady.
My homage locks your secret here for ever.

Touching his heart.

Laodamia. I think you speak sincerely.

Lapo. From my heart!
And now, Signora, listen! The Frate needs
No aid, you said. What of the words he spoke:
"The sad wild faces," and, "the lonely cell"?
You noticed that?

Laodamia [*breathlessly*]. Yes, yes !

Lapo. The fasts, the vigils :
No woman's care to save him.

Laodamia. God is with him.

Lapo. I hope so : God has given him much to bear,
And little comfort. That his friends should see to.
Which brings me to the purpose of my visit.
Signora, when the white magnolia flower
Bares its immaculate bosom to the sun,
That hour a blight besieges all its cells :
So in this fair fruition of his life
A slow obsession of the Frate's foes
Menaces his destruction. Not unmarked
Our prophet shames the pontiff ; not unscathed
He quells the pranks and orgies Florence loves :
More safely shall you grasp the hungry flames
Than scold a Pope, or curb a city's sport.

Laodamia. Indeed the Pope is strong, but God, meseems,—
God and King Charles are stronger.

Lapo. God, Signora,—
God is the product of two mighty factors,
Fortune and Force ; whom God helps none may hinder.
But as for Charles, had but the Frate known
How Malice in its own despite enlarged him,
Showing a dagger blunted by his glance,
And Princes at his thunders dropping dead,—
And had he known withal how Louis' son
Shies like a colt at shadows——-

Laodamia. Well, what then ?

Lapo. Psha ! He would know he rides upon a bubble.

Laodamia. The same methinks that Daniel trusted in,—
God's righteousness.

Lapo. Small matter, you will say,

How Charles was won, if he will fight our battle :
But will he ?

Laodamia. Is he not sworn ?

Lapo. " Aye, while it serves us,"
So says " good Guillaume." I doubt it will not serve them.

Laodamia [*indignantly*]. And who are you that you dare prophesy ?

Lapo. Only a mere interpreter, Signora ;
Yet, thanks to four good tongues and two good ears,
In the way of my humble calling come some secrets :
As this [*handing her a letter*],
The ambassor of Ludovic,
The Duke of Milan, writes it to a clerk
From Ferdinand of Spain.

Laodamia [*in alarm*]. What does it mean ?

Lapo. Certes that Rome, Spain, Naples, Germany,
Milan and Venice, all the world to wit,
Will, ere Valori's boughs are clothed again,
Be leagued to wedge our Cyrus and his Daniel
I' the boot of Italy, and crush them there.
Truly, Signora, his foes are gathering round.

Laodamia [*after a pause*]. God will protect the right.

Lapo. He does it strangely :
Count up the frauds and butcheries of each Prince,
You have, they say, the number of his leagues.
Charles may have time to conquer Rome and Naples,
And then—what said your father ?—" All he wins
Slips from his grasp like sand through open fingers."
If luck befalls, at best he cuts his way
Back into France, like one pursued by wolves,
Tossing to Milan Pisa and Leghorn,
To Venice Genoa,—Spain Calabria,—

And to the Pope the foe he fears the most,—
Fra Jerome!
Laodamia. My God! And they will burn him!
Lapo. Yes, beyond doubt.
Laodamia. What can we do to save him?
Alas, I am a woman. And my father
Has power no longer. Once he had,—yes, once.
Lapo. I am a man, Signora, and your servant.
Laodamia. Go, then, and warn the Frate.
Lapo. No, Signora.
What can he do? Don arms and fight the league?
No; trust to me. I am not new at statecraft.
With worldly wit we grapple worldly men.
Merely as Prior of St Mark's the Frate
Is quarry for the Pope; as Cardinal
Their falcons cannot strike him. Now's the time!
Chief man in Florence, right hand of King Charles,
A Cardinal's hat is his; it needs but the asking.
Laodamia. He ask!
Lapo. He would not,—no: but we can.
Laodamia. We?
Lapo. You look askance upon my hose; and rightly:
What folly flaunts in silk, what wit in fustian!
That fault your wealth corrects.
Laodamia. Sure but in Rome
They are great lords, and inaccessible.
Lapo. Alps have their passes, castles have their posterns,
And the holy father has the fair Vanozza.
Eheu! fugaces—I knew her, not unkindly:
A jest delights her. . . . By the Mass, I have it!
Employ a sculptor: bid him mould the Frate:
Plaster will serve,—full length and highly coloured.
Straightway Vanozza gives a little supper.

Enter the Pope: first dish, announced a peacock,
Huge, cooked with feathers. Lift the cover, lo!
The pestilent Monk, a Bobadil in frocks,
Sword in his hand, obscene, absurd, his mouth
Puffing great prophecies: Gladius super terram
Cito et velociter. Borgia laughs and swears,
Fronting at last the goblin of his dreams.
Then up trips fair Vanozza, blows a kiss,
Draws from her silken gown a scarlet hat:
"Cardinal, dear, your sword! This serves you better!"
The hint is taken, and the Frate saved.

Laodamia. Go, sirrah! I will have nought to do with this:
It shames me that I talk with you.

Lapo. Ebbene!
Then leave the Monk to perish.

Laodamia. I will not hear you!

Lapo. Nay then, I urge you not! Your hands are white,—
So white, forsooth, you fear a speck of soot:
Therefore the Monk must perish in the flames.
Addio, Signora. In your dreams to-night
Think of some other men who dared the Pope:
Huss, the Bohemian, burnt alive at Constance;
The friends of Waldo racked and flayed and frozen;
Arnold of Brescia hanged and burnt at Rome;
Dolcino, naked, carried in a car,
Piecemeal with red-hot irons pinched to death,
His bones laid bare, his eyes, ears, nostrils, fingers,
Tossed to the gibing crowd,—and then he died:
All holy men who shamed a profligate Pope,
Think of their fates; for such will be the Frate's.
I quit you. Addio!

Laodamia. No, Signor, stay!
What do you ask? For furtherance? Never, Signor!

Gold? It is charity. . . . How much?

Lapo. Heaven save you:
A matter of some five hundred crowns. For, see:
Rome and the arts are costly.

Laodamia. Pray you, wait.

Exit Laodamia.

Lapo [*alone*].

Still fair, sweet wife; and still thou wear'st a bodkin.
Yet, 'faith, we've dropped a poison on the tip,
Sugar'd, but like to canker in thy breast.—
Bene! King Charles has failed us; this is better.
The Borgia buys his mistress of her husband
For an argosy of gold and the rank of Marquis.
Next to the Borgia, Jerome to-day
Is counted mightiest frock in Christendom,
Champion of Chastity, hence in my power.
To-morrow sees him Pope, and in that chair
There's foothold for my climbing.

Laodamia [*entering with a bag of money*].

Signor, here . . .
Oh, but my mind misgives me. Wait one day:
Let me ask counsel.

Lapo. Humbly I say it, Signora:
Then I refuse the money: secrecy
Is urgent. As for your misgivings, say:
Can Love prompt evil actions?—Love, I mean,
Of holy causes.

Laodamia. Truly: but, O Signor!
Do nothing that dishonours him we serve.

Lapo. Trust me, Signora. . . .
[*She hands him the money.*] I shall write from Rome:
Meanwhile, allow the hint: a Cardinal
Stands high above reproach. . . . a woman's care,—

Not one of them but has it. . . . Not so, now :
The Frate is not Cardinal as yet ;
Though by Heaven's grace he shall be. Fare you well. *Exit.*
Laodamia [*alone*]. " The sad wild faces " and " the lonely cell ! "
So wan ! So worn !—To save him once again !—
Has he, have I no right to happiness ?

ACT III

SCENE I.—*Florence. The Duomo or Cathedral. Choirs of the white-robed Children of the King. A crowd intent on Savonarola, who is in the pulpit concluding his sermon.*

Savonarola. Lastly, O Florence, hearken. There be those
Who say "The Frate led us to this pass:
He leagued us with the King of France, who snatched
Pisa, Leghorn, Sarzana and Librefatta;
Who vowed to give them back, but holds them still;
And lo the league flames up against him, and
Our fortunes are as faggots in the flame:
All this the Frate did." Now, Florence, hearken:
Charles is not conquered yet,—not yet forsworn.
Did I not meet the King a second time,—
Command him, win his promises again?
Pisa he will surrender, and once more
Gird on the panoply of God's Revenge.
Yet, lest he fail us, note ye this, O Florence:
I leagued ye not with Charles. My politics
Are not to bind nor break with Rome or France.
Tides ebb and flow: I build alone on God.
O Italy, a merry dance is thine,
Fain to link always with the strongest arm,—
Now this, now that. Have ye not heard of old,

God built the world ? Is any strong as He ?
Think ye that when the stanchions of this pile
Were laid, Arnolfo parleyed with the winds,
Saying, O North Wind, Tramontana, prop
This wall ; Libecciata, wind of rains,
For thee this conduit ? Nay, Arnolfo took
Counsel with God : the oaks, the steadfast pines,
The shapely flowers, the laws that swing the stars
In rhythmic orbits,—these admonished him.
For as the heavens are builded, so this Dome ;
And as the stars above thee, so within
Thy duty shines. Yea, like a dream this world
Melts, and our days fly up like wreaths of smoke ;
Nor is aught firm but Righteousness and God.
Wherefore I made my pact with God alone :
Thou, Florence, art established on Right.
Plant thou thy feet upon this rock, and nations
Shall break like hail upon thy battlements.
Yea, plant thy feet, but not as those who play
At tourney with their paste-board bourdonasses :
No joust is this ; God's chivalry are ye.
Crusaders, go ye forth ; gird on your sword,
The unconquerable steel Contempt of Death,—
Victory is yours ! O Florence, thou shalt conquer,—
Yea, though thou fight the whole world, and alone.
This is the question, this the hour ; thy Conscience,
The Voice of God within thee, City of Florence,
Stands up before thee, cries in my voice, Choose
'Twixt goods that perish, or the eternal Good,—
Choose thou, to chaffer with the Lords of Lust,
That make this land one seething vat of crime,
Or now, for life or death, a band elect,
Uplift and plant the Gonfalon of God. . . .

Thou wilt? Behold thy captain, sworn to stand
Or fall with thee! . . . Thou wilt not? Florence, I,—
I who have stood upon thy walls and cried—
Cried in the night to all the nations round,
"The enemy is upon thee! Rise! Awake!"—
O Florence, I go forth alone, alone!
Take thou my body, Christ: I can no more!
Make me thy martyr! Yea, I kiss the Cross!
I bathe my body in the flames of anguish!
Thou shalt not triumph, Satan, though this dust
Is cast upon the winds. Like seed, yea like
Vines in wild places flung when waters fail,
Touched by the well-spring of thy Love, 'twill rise,—
Thanks be to God, who crowns me with His thorns!

As he descends from the pulpit this hymn is sung.

All.

Son of Mary, Paraclete,
Sower of celestial wheat,
Stars in sky and love in clay,
Florence cries to thee to-day:
Viva Gesu, nostro rè!

Voices of "The Children of the King."

Thou has trod our pathway lowly,
Making thorns and blossoms holy:
Gesu, at thy feet we lay
Palms of love to strew thy way.
Viva Gesu, nostro rè!

Young men's voices.

When unholy shapes allure us
By thy sacred mount secure us;
Evil lives for us to slay,—
God of Battles ours the fray.
Viva Gesu, nostro rè!

Girls' voices.

Cana fills our flasks with wine,—
Mingling marriage love with thine;
Orange flowers are thine array;
Trim our lamps to shine for aye.
Viva Gesu, nostro rè!

Duet.

Graves are footprints; there thy feet
Lit, and passing left them sweet:
Cypress blossoms into May:
Loved ones there in peace we lay.
Viva Gesu, nostro rè!

All.

Lo our ark is whelmed with grief.
Waft, O Dove, thine olive leaf:
Floods are rising, storms dismay:
Through the casement waft thy ray.
Viva Gesu, nostro rè!

Foes surround us! Save us, Lord!
Rise, Jehovah! Bare thy sword!
Rise and hurl thy foes away!
Florence cries to Thee to-day:
Viva Gesu, nostro rè!

As the congregation files out Laodamia, clad in white, with the "Children of the King," is accosted by Lapo, now well dressed, but still wearing a beard and unrecognised.

Lapo. Signora——

Laodamia. Signor?

Lapo. You have forgotten me?
The Guide,—the Interpreter; we met at Pisa.
My mission for the Frate is accomplished.

Laodamia [*eagerly*]. Yes?

Lapo. "Foes surround us; Save us, Lord," they sang;
And I am the answer to that prayer; I bring
The town's salvation in a Scarlet Hat:
The little dinner of Vanozza did it.
Fairest Signora——

Laodamia. Let us tell him! Come!

Lapo. Softly! Valori waits to see him. Much
Has passed this morning since he left his cell.
First let the impact of calamity
Break his proud spirit; then, like balm, your voice,
Breathes of a sweet appeasement. Come this way.

Savonarola comes forward. Several men and women are waiting to speak with him, among them Valori in the gown of the Signori, and a Usurer with a bag of gold. The two latter approach Savonarola. Valori gives way to the Usurer.

Savonarola. My son, how can I serve you?

Usurer [*with trepidation*]. An't please you. . . .
God pardon me.

Savonarola. Fear not, but speak. Your name?

Usurer. Luigi, the money-lender, pray God pardon.

Savonarola. Who ask with deeds, not words, He will. . . .
What's here? [*Pointing to the bag of gold.*

Usurer. Gold, father.

Savonarola. Or blood?

Usurer. Na, na! My name is good:
None pays but what he bargains at my table.
But an you please to buy some candlesticks,—
Gold, father, gold,—for the altar at Saint Mark's,—
So be you'll say for my little son that's dead
Some four score masses, here's as many ducats.

Savonarola. Luigi, Saint Mark's requires not gold nor silver:
God's altars all are broken down with gold:
Yet if I say the masses for your son,
Will ye supply the lights?

Usurer. Na, that is nought!
I'll more than that: one ducat buys your wax.

Savonarola. Luigi, our candles at Saint Mark's are three,
Truth, Justice, and Compassion. Not from you
Shall four score ducats light them.

Usurer. "Na," ye say:
Ye will not say the masses?

Savonarola. Yes, O Luigi:
For your bambino masses shall be said:
But there will be no lights: all darkness, Luigi.

Usurer. Ye cannot say a mass without the candles.

Savonarola. God sees by other lights than ours, my son.

Usurer. Na! Na! They'll say I will not pay the candles.

Savonarola. They'll say truth, my son.

Usurer. I'll make it five score: Come!

Savonarola. Not fifty buys them. Yet if you restore
To Messer Baccio's widow your extortion
That she may rear *her* little son, then, Luigi,
The candles might be lit.

Usurer. Come! Here be six score.
Give her them, thou: I'll nought to do with her.

Savonarola. Think, Luigi: I might rob you of your gold.

Usurer. Na, father, we all know thee: come, come! I'll trust thee.

Savonarola. You are poor, my son: you have no riches,——

Usurer. Eh?
I'm not so sure I could not buy ye Pisa!

Savonarola [*continuing*]. And if I robbed you of your only wealth,

And you should stand a pauper before God,
Crying to see your little son again,——
Usurer. Eh? Eh? What say ye, priest? I will! I will!
Savonarola [*continuing*]. And God should say you are too poor for Heaven,——
Usurer [*fiercely*]. I'll see him, aye I will. Here's ten score! Come!
Put ye that in the prayers.
Savonarola. We pray with deeds. . . .
Yes, Luigi, God *will* say ye are too poor:
Rags! Rags of greed! Heaven will not have such paupers!
But if this widow smiles on you, then God
Will see that smile in gold upon your soul,
And say, "Come look upon your son again."
Usurer. An't please you, father, come along with me:
I'll make yon widow glad.
Savonarola. My son, I will.
So shall ye light the candles for your boy,
And mass be said with candles once a week.
No riches, O my son, ye take to Heaven
Except your brothers' and your sisters' smiles.
[*Turns to Valori.*] Messer Valori.
[*To Usurer.*] Wait me, my son, without.

Valori, who has been speaking with another well-dressed Florentine, comes forward.

Valori. Good morrow.
Savonarola. Who is that?
Valori. One Cini, a convert.
Savonarola. Once exiled in Ferrara?
Valori. Yes, the same:
A Florentine of weight; spoken, they say,
For ballot. We may need him.
Savonarola. Ah, Cini,—yes!

A face once seen not often I forget.
Well, and the news?
Valori. The worst: King Charles of France
Turns renegade: our sword i' the sky, forsooth,
Was but a windlestraw,—gone on a puff.
Pressed by the league, his army flies to France.
Pisa, Leghorn, Sarzana,—they are sold.
Savonarola. Sold?
Valori. To our foes.
Savonarola. He swore upon the altar.
Valori. Who heeds an oath?
Savonarola. In Italy. But France——
Valori. Also the Pope pronounces you a heretic.
Savonarola. Valori, it is false. My creed is Rome's,—
My doctrine but to live the Upright Life.
Valori. The Eight withal are warned you must not preach.
Do you submit? Frate, we stand by you.
But since your breath has raised a storm beyond
Our manage for the hour, I counsel silence.
Savonarola [*after a pause*]. "Tulerunt lapides:—They took up stones
To cast at him; but Jesus hid himself,
And went out from the temple." Thus my master . . .
Yes, for the hour I yield.
Valori. Said wisely, Frate!
Reef till the storm has passed; and for the rest—
Good cause, good courage. . . . Here comes Benedetto.

Enter Fra Benedetto.

Benedetto. Frate! Valori! The city is up! The news
Spreads, and the Arrabbiati, Compagnacci,
The Tiepidi—all the hostile factions

Combine against us ; Ludovic supports them :
Now they fear nought.
Valori. Fear ? Orsù ! But they shall !
The Eight are with us still,—the Eight shall teach them,—
Out of a book whose words are strokes o' the sword—
The sword of Justice carven with the names
Of twice ten thousand honest citizens,
Who in the Frate see the arm of God.
Benedetto. But, will they see it now ? I like it not.
Savonarola [*to Valori*]. Go then, my son ; enroll all citizens :
Shamed is that folk that guards with purchased armies
Home, honour, faith and freedom : free they are not,
But slaves of ease. *Exit Valori.*
Benedetto. Well said ! I drop my palette :
Steel is my brush ; no paradise I'll paint !
Nay, but I'll show these rebels hell ! Hot red !
Savonarola. Bettuccio of the tavern speaks, I ween,—
Not Brother Benedetto of St Mark's.
Benedetto [*turns to go, muttering*]. Aye, aye ! I'll show them hell ! I'll——
Savonarola. Go ! do penance,
Working, as far as may be, night and day,
At the Hall of the Greater Council. Finish it :
Stablish our Temple of Mercy, that no soul,
However poor or base, convict of crime,
May be denied appeal. For as a man
Stricken looks inward, fain to cleanse his spirit,
So in this wrack the City first shall purge
Its own injustices, and then uplift
Clean hands in prayer, and cry on God for succour.
Exit Benedetto.
Cries [*from without*]. Frataccio ! Frataccio ! Give us back our Pisa !

Enter a mob headed by Mazzinghi, Ridolfi and Cei.

Cei [*struts in strumming his lute*].

Ping! Ping! Ping!
Let the Piagnoni swing!
For the city's like a camposan—to,
With its miauling, bawling can—to,
And its "Gesu King!"
And its ting, ting, ting,
And its drivelling, snivelling san—to!

The Mob. Abbasso Francesi! Evviva, Evviva Roma!

One of the mob thrusts himself forward and shakes his fist at Savonarola, crying again:

Frataccio! Frataccio! Give us back our Pisa!

Savonarola [*waving them back with his hands*].

This is the temple of God! Away! Away!

Voices. Back! Back! The Prophet!

A Woman [*crouching by a pillar and pointing at him*].

Santiddio! See his eyes!
They pierce like swords,—kill like the basilisk.

Cei [*striking his lute*].

Ping! Ping! Ping!
Let the Piagnoni swing!
For the city's like a——

A Paciero, or officer of the cathedral, makes a rush at him. He runs off, laughing loudly.

Mazzinghi [*for whom meanwhile the crowd has made way*].

Now, prithee, Frate, what is this we hear?
Was not your Cyrus vowed to give us back
Pisa, Leghorn, Sarzana, and Librefatta?
And lo, he sells them to our foes! What next?
Thou hadst thy Bonfire of the Vanities;
Our seaports, lands, allies,—wilt burn them too?
Wilt snatch the very garments from our backs?

Voices. Evviva Mazzinghi ! Abbasso Frataccio !

Re-enter in haste, during the last words, Valori. He confronts Mazzinghi.

Valori. What, thou, Mazzinghi ? Thou among this rabble ?

Mazzinghi. Yes ; for I seek to save the city.

Valori. False !

Thou seekest leave to sin ; thou evil ferment,
Thou vinegar of vice and malcontent,
What ! dost thou chafe at piety and peace ?
Wouldst crown again the lord of lies and lust ?
Thou shalt not.

Mazzinghi. Whom I crown is nought to thee.
My speech is with the Frate.

Valori. Thou, Mazzinghi,
Thou of the tyrant's faction ?

Mazzinghi. No, Valori,
Thou knowest that I rebelled against the Medici.

Valori. Orsù ! thou didst, for thou art rebel born,—
Thou and thy crew. Fra Girolamo saved ye :
Else wert thou dead, or dungeoned in the Stinche.
Traitor, begone : or the wagging of thy hood
Shall wag thy truculent head off.

Mazzinghi shrugs and gives place to Ridolfi.

Ridolfi [*to Valori*]. Pardon, Signor :
Reverently I ask it of your Frate :
It flies about the city that the Pope
Forbids his preaching.

Savonarola. It is true, my son.

Ridolfi. Then, with obeisance, these good citizens
Pray you will not incur the wrath of Rome
Persisting.

Valori. Nay, but make no answer, Frate !
Ridolfi, ha ! thou tyrant's understrapper !

But yesterday the rope was round thy neck.—
Who took it off? The Frate. Whelp, thou knowest!
So dost thou pay? This for thy shaming, traitor.

Strikes him in the face. Savonarola interposes. A cry of "The Guard!" Enter Constabulary. The mob take flight. Mazzinghi and Ridolfi remain.

Savonarola [*to Valori*]. My son, what have ye done?—and in this church?
God and our foes forgive the sacrilege!
Messer Ridolfi, as I bear no malice
For this your ill requital, so I pray you
Desist and pardon. What you ask I do.

Ridolfi. Ebbene, Father. . . . Have no fear, Valori.
Not here we quit accounts: they run! they run!

Mazzinghi. Farewell, Signori! We shall meet again:
Not always will the Eight be on your side.

Exeunt Mazzinghi and Ridolfi.

Valori. That word is true. Already it is rumoured,—
At the next ballot of the Eight, we face
The backwash of the tide, with such as these
Our Lords and Magistrates.

Savonarola. O stout Valori,
Not in the ballot, nor in France we trust:
In Deo speravi: quid faciat homo?
What can flesh do to us whose strength is God?

Valori. Nay, Frate, not that day,—your day of Palms,—
When in the hollow of your hand I said
You held the town, and you replied, "Aye, aye!
To offer it on the altar unto God!"
Not even then had I a stouter heart.—
Farewell! I rally the faithful to the Cause.

Exit.

Laodamia, with Lapo at a short distance behind her, draws near to Savonarola.

Laodamia. Father, Oh, can I speak with you ?

Savonarola. Return
Speedily, daughter : meet me here again.
I seek for strength in prayer.

Exeunt in different directions. The Duomo is dark and vacant for a brief space. Enter Cei and Dolfo. Cei drags a huge bag with the help of two urchins.

Cei. So ho, sweet Dolfo !
Hast dodged those canting devils ?

Dolfo. Aye.

Cei. And I.
The dead lie underneath us, and aloft—
The weathercock ! Ha ! ha ! The wind has changed.
Now let us sing a hymn, and then to work.

[*Sings to his lute.*]

O my pretty Bianchetta,
Tell me, whither hast thou flown ?
I have searched thy casinetta,
And thy nooks and cameretta,
But Bianca there was none.

O her laugh ! her cicalate !
'Twas a peal of little bells !
Now she's weeping her peccati,
With the ranting canting Frati :
Devils roast them in their cells !

Dost know that sweet one, Dolfo ?

Dolfo. What, thy songs ?
Gnaf-fé ! Thou knowst I cannot stomach them.

Wilt roast the Frate in his cell? By Bacco,
I am thy man.
Cei. Nay, O Ithuriel!
Thou seraph with the flaming sword! I speak
Of sweet Bianca. Dost thou know her?
Dolfo. Faugh!
She smells of paternosters.
Cei. True; and once
That was a wench as dainty as my lute.
These be sad times. Scarce can ye buy a kiss
For twenty crowns; and ere the Frate's day
They sold them by the gross for half a lira.
Dolfo. What's i' that bag?
Cei. Dolfo, a secret! a secret!
That bag contains—what think ye? [*He whispers.*
Dolfo. That is good!
Cei. We lay it in the pulpit; hide it well
With fragrant rose-leaves strewn as if in love:
Then shall he stand on it, the bag shall break:
He chokes, he sneezes, soaked and swaddled in it.
Dolfo. Stay! I've a thought [*scratches his head*]. Bacco, I'll better that!
Dolfo has fancies: mark you that, old 'Cecco.
Hold! Stop you here!
Cei. What seek ye?
Dolfo. Spikes, man,—spikes!
Cei. What for, sweet Dolfo?
Dolfo [*pointing to the pulpit*]. See ye that wooden edge?
That spout o' the preaching pot? He pummels that:
Bang on the rail. Ha! ha!
Cei. But how, my dearest,—
How hide thy thorns to grow among my roses?
Dolfo. Leave that to me.

Cei. Dolfo, thou art inspired.
I, too, sweet Dolfo. The afflatus of the Gods
Descends upon me. Hearken, son of Mars!
Fetch me an ass: a lean, a hungry ass;
A frock, a cowl,—a spattered blackfriar's lucco.
Therein, sweet Dolfo, thou shalt dress the ass;
And prog him on the spear-point through the town,
Crying The Frate! The Frate!—until, pell-mell,
The whole town yelps and bellows at his heels.

Dolfo. By Bacco, that is good! It shall be done.

Cei. And when he climbs the pulpit on the morrow,—
Hola! the ass,—flayed, hung above the Frate!
A string shall jerk his ears and make them wag.

Dolfo. Aye, and the spikes, the—ha! ha! ha! Come, 'Cecco.

Cei. Cantate Domino! Now let us sing!
Wang! Wang! Wang!
Let the Frate go hang!
With his tattery, spattery luc-co,
And his sorry, sorry hen-laid cuc-co——

Dolfo. Truce o' thy little tin words and tum-tum-tummings.
Let us to work. *Exeunt.*

Enter from the rear Savonarola. Laodamia comes forward. They meet. The guide waits at a respectful distance.

Savonarola. You seek for counsel, daughter?

Laodamia. The clouds are dark,—so dark about you, father.

Savonarola. True,—and our wheat ungarnered.

Laodamia. Ah, but you;
Wrestling alone amid the blinding wrack,
Tieing your sheaves, tieing your sheaves,—and he
The Pontiff,—he who wields the bolts of heaven,
Plunging them one by one, until at last

You fall. O father, night and day my dreams
Picture you so. Ah, could we shelter you ! . . .
Girolamo, yes, we can ! Have I done wrong ?
I lead you into safety !

Savonarola. Safety, daughter ?
For those who do the right no danger lives,—
No safety for the wrong.

Laodamia. We fight the world :
We need some base. Charles fails us ?

Savonarola. O my daughter !
And if it break,—that reed we leant upon,—
Is it not well ? For so we fall on God !

Laodamia. Some rampart to your stronghold,—that we need ! . . .
If you were Pope ? . . . Only from Peter's chair
Can you reform the Church.

Savonarola. They say it—yes.

Laodamia. O father, if a White Bird from God's throne
Laid on your head a crown, a Cardinal's hat,
And bade you take the first step to that chair,—
Were you not glad ?

Savonarola. Our vigils breed a vapour :
Daughter, you dream.

Laodamia. I speak the truth. To-night
The Papal Agent visits at your cell.
I am the White Bird,—ah, you called me that,—
Once in Ferrara, long ago, you said it,—
And on your head I lay God's coronal :
Father, the crown is yours.

Savonarola. They sent you ? . . . Ha ! . . .

Laodamia. Freely I come ; I wrought this ; I am proud.

Savonarola. And but this hour they called me heretic :

My God! Can this be true? . . . I will not take it.
I spurn the bribe.

Laodamia. Sure, dignities refused
Are laurels given of God and flung to earth,
Weapons of service idly laid aside,
Brevets disdained in pride? What said your Dante
Of Celestine who, called to Peter's chair,
Returned the Great Refusal?

Savonarola. That, my daughter,
That was the Apostle's call to cleanse the Church;
This were Iscariot's silver. "Hush," cries Rome,—
"Be silent while we sin!" I will not hush:
My voice shall cry aloud.

Laodamia. O Father! Father!
Pity it were to impale your life and service
On this compunction,—pity, ah, how great,
To shipwreck all your mission on a scruple.
Are you not orthodox?

Savonarola. Yes, daughter, yes.

Laodamia. Then must you obey the Pope.

Savonarola. Is he the Pope
Who bought his crown with bags of stolen gold?
Should I be Cardinal if I should sell
My conscience for the Hat?

Laodamia. Think of the city.

Savonarola. I would,—I would that I could give it ease.

Laodamia. You can, my father.

Savonarola. If I betray my Lord.

Laodamia. You do not. Oh, for our sakes I implore you!
As daughter of Florence, oh, I pray you do this!
For the world's sake do so and redeem the world;
For the Church's sake whom, yielding, you will save;
For your own dear safety, father, I beseech you!

Yes, by the love we bore of old, we two,
My Girolamo, say not No.
Savonarola. O my daughter,
You press me sorely. It is not well,—not well!
Laodamia. If wrong there be, I answer before God.
There is no wrong: the crime is in refusal.
Savonarola. If I surrender, on terms implied, not said:
Dropping my sword to take it up again—— ?
Laodamia. Soon, Girolamo; and then to save the Church.
Savonarola [*meditatively*]. Man owes, I said, one debt: to God alone,—
In paying which, he pays all debts to man.
God speaks within our Conscience, guiding so
Our deeds, as Beauty guides the artist's hand:
Whence comes the perfect picture of our lives.
Conscience eschews this bribe; the City cries
Accept it. If a man betray his trust
To save a city, will the Judge condemn him? . . .
Tell me, my daughter, are there terms explicit:
Must I forswear my mission?
Laodamia. No, Girolamo.
Savonarola. Idle to shut our eyes——
Lapo, who has drawn nearer during the colloquy, now interposes.
Lapo. Santissimo,
Pardon! I heard your question. . . . By your leave [*to Laodamia*],
I can assure the holy Frate:—Yes;
The terms are to your honour. When to-night
The papal agent issues from your cell
It will be cried through all the streets, "Once more
The Frate saves the City!" As from France,
So now from the league you save it. Rome will see

That Milan, Germany, Venice, Spain,—our foes,—
Let fall their swords and stretch the hand of friendship.
The seaports loved of Florence as a woman
Dotes on her babes,—Pisa, Leghorn, Sarzana,—
All are restored to her,—not vowed, but given.
This is your second triumph. Grateful Florence
Will shower on you her wealth. Supported so,
Your reverence will succeed to Peter's chair,
And from that summit rule the world for Christ.

Savonarola. There are no other terms?

Lapo. Santissimo, none:
Merely a little writing in your hand
Renouncing your alliance with the French,—
(Silvius, recanting, climbed to Peter's Chair)
Vowing to yield submission to the Pope,—
(As do we all, true sons of Holy Church)
And not denounce the Church's so-called errors,—
(Leave that to God: His grace alone suffices).

Savonarola [*after a pause, deliberately*].
"Assumpsit eum Diabolus:—the Devil
Taketh Him into a mount exceeding high,
And sheweth Him all the kingdoms of the world:
'All these are thine if thou wilt worship me'"——
[*In a terrible voice.*]
Get thee behind me, Satan!

Lapo. Pardon, father:
My wits are wheezy hacks: your airy mountain,—
By the Mass, they boggle at it!

Savonarola. The papal agents
Need that I give an answer now?

Lapo. To-night
Or never.

Savonarola. Then, my son, we go our ways,—

I to my Master,—they to theirs to say
While Judas sits in Peter's Chair I take
From him no red hat of a Cardinal,
Rather the martyr's crown of blood.

Lapo. Ebbene !
A pretty text ! We are not i' the pulpit now.
Mark that this answer flings the fatal glove :
War to the death,—and you are not the stronger.

Savonarola. Alas, my son, I would it were not now.

Lapo. Still time to alter, Frate.

Savonarola. I have spoken.

Lapo. One further word. We know your chastity.
None calls a lifelong passion base, and none
Rebukes a Cardinal.

Savonarola [*looking from Lapo to Laodamia, who betrays confusion*]. Ha, what is this ?

Lapo. All frock,—no flesh,—is pleasing unto Heaven :
Reverently I say it : also on earth
The chaste embrace of rack and flame consoles. . . .
Still the same answer ?

Savonarola. Go, thou son of Satan !

Lapo. Addio, Santissimo.

Lapo withdraws. Savonarola gazes for a moment reproachfully at Laodamia, then turns to go.

Laodamia. What have I done !
Girolamo ! Father ! Forgive me ! Speak one word !

Savonarola [*pointing to Lapo*]. Your husband.

Laodamia [*wildly and with amazement*]. Husband ?

Savonarola. Join him. As for me,
If it be death, I trust in God. Farewell.

SCENE II.—*The same. The Duomo is dimly lighted. Dolfo Spini and 'Cecco Cei descend from the pulpit. Enter Ridolfi and Mazzinghi.*

Ridolfi. Well met! And is the Frate's carpet laid?
Cei. Aye: but the rose-leaves will not cover it.
Ridolfi. The ass's skin is hung?
Dolfo. Aye, wi' the ears:
But, Gnaf-fé! they will not wag.
Cei. Fellows, I swear
The Frate has bewitched the place.
Dolfo. Aye, that is so.
Ridolfi. 'Cecco, I missed your pageant of the ass.
Cei. Talk not to me, Ridolfi: I am sick! I am sick!
Fellow, the town's a corpse. As well, I say,
Cry Oyez! Oyez! to dead men in their graves
As set these snivellers yelping to our tune.
Mazzinghi. None followed your halloo?
Cei. A score of Ciompi,
Some gutter fry, and cutthroats out of work.
Mazzinghi. The rest?
Cei. Clove to their doorsteps,—shrugged or scowled,
Then turned to drone their damnèd paternosters.
I am sick! I am sick! The town's a corpse, I say.
Dolfo. Valori has scared yon rabbits to their holes.
Ridolfi. So where's thy chance of ballot now, Mazzinghi?
Dolfo. Gnaf-fé! I would have sworn the wind blew south.
Mazzinghi. From Rome? And so it did.
Ridolfi. This morning.
Mazzinghi. Yes.
Ridolfi. Now not a breath! A dead and damnèd calm!
What's to be done, eh, Dolfo?

Dolfo. I say, Halt !
And let their pudding stew.
Ridolfi. O sapient Spini !
Cei. Bah ! it will stew till Doomsday.
Ridolfi. By St. Anna,
Fellows, we are fooled ! The world against one shaveling,
And yet we dare not fell him to the earth.

Lapo issues from behind a pillar, where he had been kneeling, close but unseen.

Lapo. Signors, a citizen of Rome, I greet you !
I rise from my devotions and behold
Four illustrissimi : birth, sword and song,
And law—each at its apex. Happy Florence !
Immedicable Rome.
Ridolfi. Immedicable ?
Why, signor ? What disease has Rome ?
Lapo. The itch.
Dolfo. Then let the city scratch itself.
Lapo. Ser Dolfo,
The itch is named the Frate.
Ridolfi. We have it too :
Worse, Signor, worse !
Lapo. What ! you ?—You have the cure.
Dolfo. Gnaf-fé ! I would we knew it.
Lapo. Ah ! You do not ?
You fear this monk ? Daggers are his, and dungeons,
And courts to doom his foes ?
Mazzinghi. Well, no.
Lapo. What then ?
Mazzinghi. Signor, perceive : we fear the town, not him.
Three parts of it are his : he nods our laws
To twenty thousand knees upon this floor.
Lapo. So ! He is doubtless Jove, or Cæsar. Yet

Some wise man progged an ass along your streets,
And cried, " The Frate ! "
Mazzinghi [*looking toward Cei*]. A kite to catch the wind :
No breeze : they shrug and say, " He prophesies."
Lapo. And did not Balaam's ass ? And still methinks
'Twas but an ass : obstinate, and a brayer . . .
They say your ass was stripped.
Dolfo. We flayed him.
Lapo. And then ?
Ebbene ! Death soon followed ?
Dolfo. That is wrong :
We slew him first.
Lapo. Nay, but you were not wise.
Dolfo. Ha' pity on your beast !
Lapo [*shrugs*]. With due obeisance,—
Should we not say, Have pity on your Florence,
That cannot ride its ass, but must forsooth
Be ridden by it ?
Dolfo. That is true.
Lapo. And why ?
Because it will not strip him.
Mazzinghi. Prithee, Signor ?
Lapo. Unmask, detect, expose. Where lies his power ?
In righteousness ?—I voice the heart of Florence
When I protest we all love righteousness,
But trade is better.—Where, then ? As you say,
They cry, " He prophesies ! " And so they fear him.
But, Sirs, I am a philosopher : I would try
This prophet as your alchemist a metal.
You do not comprehend ? Can any of you
Propose a quirk to rid us of a quack ?
Ridolfi. Not I.
Dolfo. Nor I.

Ridolfi. Thou, 'Cecco.

Cei. I am sick! I am sick!

Lapo. What wager that I shall not do this thing?

Dolfo. By Bacco, I will wage five hundred ducats:
That will I pay to prick this ass's hide.

Lapo. Done, Messer Dolfo. Sirs, you witness this?

All. Aye, aye!

Lapo. Now shall I show you?

Dolfo. Aye, we hearken.

Lapo. Signors, four centuries ago and more,
In the year of our Lord ten hundred and sixty-three,
Your great Piazza saw a marvellous sight:
An Earthly Purgatory,—faggots piled,
Two flaming alleys, and adown their midst
Two champions vowed to walk and prove their cause:
That, Signor, of the Frate against the Pope.
God would protect the right (an ancient error),
And singe no fleece upon the good man's cloak.
Signors, the precedent is on your Book
Of Statutes to this day. It is the law,—
The applicable law.

Mazzinghi. Aha!

Dolfo. By Bacco!

Cei. The Trial by Fire! So ho! The Trial by Fire!
I'll sing a rondel on the Trial by Fire!

Lapo. If, then, he shun the test, the ass is stripped,
Or if he dares it, he is burnt to death.

Dolfo. Ha! ha! We'll twig the city's ears wi' that:
Yell down the street "We'll ha' the Trial by Fire."

Lapo. Soft, friend! The Magistrates, the Eight, are still
Twirled on the Frate's thumb. They soon retire?

Mazzinghi. Ere Lent.

Lapo. You seek election?

Mazzinghi. We are named.
What chance ?
Lapo. The best. Rome plies her engines, Signor.
Henceforth, no compromise. First—interdict ;
Ports closed, trade stopped by the league,—you comprehend me?
The argument ad ventrem. Next, ad fatuas,
To wit the pious,—excommunication ;
We starve the men, we send the wives to hell :
Groundbait for angling. Here's your ballot-cry,—
" Save trade ; please Rome ; cheap bread and easy shrift."
The mob is at your beck ; the wand of Justice
Descends upon you : you are the Eight elect.
You comprehend me, Signors ?
Dolfo. That is well.
Mazzinghi. Then shall the Eight propose the Trial by Fire ?
Lapo. Nay, by your leave, that were a bungler's shift.
As ladies angle with a covert hook,
Bashful and modest, so your judge affects
The air impartial. Sirs, this trial proceeds
By challenge,—life for life : that is the form.
Dolfo. Not I ! The taste of steel I know ; but fire !—
I like it not !
Lapo. Ser Dolfo, you indeed
Have other work. Always we ride the Passions.
An all too Christian love, ye may have noted,
Greyfriars to Blackfriars bear. . . .
Dolfo. Will 't run to that ?
Lapo. On certain warranties : safety to them,—
To your Blackfriars—no. . . . These be details. Addio !
We meet again. [*They bow. Exit Lapo.*
Mazzinghi. Bene ! The Trial by Fire.
Dolfo. Aye, that is good.
Cei. I wish it were not fire.

Pity your beast, sweet Dolfo.
Dolfo. What? Art squeamish?
Cei. Bianca will not like it: no, she will not.
Yet "fire" is a good rhyme, a very good rhyme:
"Water": that is not good: I could not make
A verse to rhyme with "water."
Mazzinghi. Didst note that word?
"Riding the passions?"
Dolfo. So?
Mazzinghi. And that about
Philosophy?
Dolfo. Aye, aye!
Ridolfi. A cunning knave.
Mazzinghi [*to Cei*]. Dost thou forget Ferrara?
Cei. How forget it?
The song; the dance; 'Nozza, the great white lotus!
Mazzinghi. True, and the Pazzi's friend, your Lapo.
Dolfo [*startled*]. What?
Mazzinghi. We thought him dead. 'Tis he.
Dolfo. Gnaf-fé! Gnaf-fé!
Mazzinghi. Signors, walk warily. That man sold his friends.
Dolfo. I do not like a man that sells his friends.
Mazzinghi. The bland, the guileless face. Changed certes: beard
And tan and wrinkles; also a leer has crept
Into the innocent eyes.
Dolfo. It is the same!
Cei. And yet he loved a song. I mind him well:
Free of his gold,—a supple gleesome hound.
Mazzinghi. The dog would dine upon his master's bones.
Cei. But share them with his cronies,—aye, he would!
Mazzinghi. For this deed he may earn his wage.
Dolfo. And shall.

ACT IV

SCENE I.—*Florence; the Piazza della Signoria, seen through the Loggia (or Portico) dei Lanzi. On the right hand the Palazzo Vecchio with the Ringhiera. In front three capacious wooden rostra, or platforms raised five feet from the ground and draped with arras. On the left hand a large pile of faggots with a cul-de-sac opening. The foreground is at first vacant. The populace are seen in the rear around and beyond the pile; and the balcony of a house in the Piazza is thronged. Dolfo Spini with men-at-arms keeps back the populace from the open space.*

Voices [*in the crowd*]. Affretta, Frate! Affretta! Avvanzati!

A Citizen. As though good folk must let their trade go shift,
Jammed, all a swelter, on a rainy day,
Agog for skulking priests!

2nd Citizen. "The Trial by Fire"
They call it? Pheugh! 'tis us that's tried by water.

3rd Citizen. And well ye are served, that make of God himself
A Caterer for your lust of shows and shambles.

2nd Cit. And do not ye, good Master Puccio, eh?

3rd Cit. Not I, i' faith!

2nd Cit. Why here then, Master Puccio?

Voices. Affretta, Frate! Affretta! Avvanzati!

Several Workmen issue from the Loggia bearing wood. The crowd watches them in silence.

1st Workman [*examining the wood*].
Wet all atop, but these be dry inside.

2nd Workman. Like us now, be it not?

1st Workman. And no mistake.

2nd Workman. They say, if he come out o' this alive,
The next to go inside'll be the Pope.

They replace the damp wood with dry.

Woman's Voice [*shrilly in the pause*].
Sidrach's the blessed Frate; Misach—Domenico;
Silvestro's Abdinago. Then you'll see
Messer Lord God Himself among the flames
Kissing the blessed Frate on the cheek.
Oh, what a grace we live to see this day!

Exeunt Workmen with the damp wood.

Voices. Affretta Frate! Affretta! Avvanzati!

Cei [*speaking from a balcony*]. Silence, ye citizens! Have patience.

One of the crowd. Tut!
Patience may sit on stomachs full of wine.
Mine's empty. Curse the shavelings! I've been here
Since morning.

Cei. Man, be thankful for thy mercies.
Thou canst not smell roast Frate every day.

The Workmen return with more wood. The murmur of the crowd grows silent again.

Woman [*shrilly*]. And there i' the dark they saw the blessed Frate
Transfigured like our Saviour on the Mount;
And on his shoulder sat a holy Dove,
Like Mary's star upon the crimson dawn;

And all his feathers were of gold and silver ;
And in the blessed Frate's ears he sang :
And that is how he knows the things to be.

2nd Cit. Pheugh ! I'm all sweat and drench !

1st Cit. Miracles ? Bah !
I'll sit in church and see Saint Lawrence roast.
There's Signorelli's picture shows you that.
" I'm done this side," says he. Ha ! ha ! He liked it.

2nd Cit. We're done on both sides : cheated of our show,
And a good day's trading gone.

3rd Cit. For shame !
A second Daniel in our midst to-day.
And that is all ye prate of ! Thank the Lord
The pebbles' chatter does not turn the tide.

2nd Cit. If fire kill Frate, think ye, Master Puccio,
Then will it turn ?

3rd Cit. Your " ifs " would laugh at God.

2nd Cit. How, Master Puccio ?

3rd Cit. Is God then such as ye,—
Longer in the tongue than the arm ? Nay, let thy crew
Gape on an " if " : I tell thee there be those,
Ten thousand of us in this place to-day,
That brabble not, but know.

1st Cit. Know what ? Eh, Messer ?

3rd Cit. The breath of God that swept us in the Duomo
Shall from this Piazza blow the flames we light,
So that they touch no finger of the Frate,
But burn the Borgia out of Peter's chair.

Many Citizens [*ejaculating piously*]. Well said ! Well said !

1st Cit. What now ? Here's some of them.

As the Workmen retire again, Mazzinghi, Alberti, Lapo, and Cei show themselves on the Ringhiera, and look silently on the crowd for a moment.

Lapo [*in the foreground: pensively*]. Too near, too near!
Another four score yards.
1st Cit. [*in the rear*]. Two of the Eight, eh, Messer?
2nd Cit. So they be.
The Signors Pier Alberti, and Mazzinghi.
The Trial begins!
Voices. Affretta, Frate! Affretta!
Dolfo crosses the open space and accosts Alberti and Mazzinghi.
Dolfo. Gnaf-fé! What now? The pot's aboil this four hours.
Where is thy champion?

Enter Secretary.

Secretary. Found, my lords, found at last.
Mazzinghi. Where?
Secretary. In the cellars, crouching 'neath a hogs-head;
So scared, my lord, he looked from cask to cask
As, an he might, he would have gone inside.
Cei. The strait and narrow path to heaven, pardee:
You crawl in through the bunghole.
Alberti. Is he at hand?
Secretary. Dragged in the convent cart, my lord, so far.
Mazzinghi. By the Mass then bring him forth. Dost think yon crowd
A flight of summer flies?
Secretary. Six men might drag him.
Being esteemed a judge of art, my lord,
I fear that crowning touch would mar our canvas.
Lapo. Bene, it is no matter.
Alberti. No matter, Signor?
Is not the champion pivot of this trial?

We must respect the law. And, sirs, moreover,
It was his taunts that brought the Blackfriars here.
Lapo. Nay, pardon! [*pointing across the Piazza*]
Yon grey bird on the Torrione—
Is it a dove or pigeon?
Alberti. I cannot tell.
Lapo. Nor yonder crowd one greyfriar from another.
Alberti. Not at this distance?
Lapo. They are too near—I own it.
Your pardon, Signors [*turning to the Secretary*].
Does the palace hold
Gunpowder?
Secretary. Yes.
Lapo. And pitch?
Secretary. It can be had.
Lapo. And oil, and resin?
Secretary. Doubtless.
Lapo [*turning to Mazzinghi*]. I shall need
Some ten score ducats.
Mazzinghi. Thou art a hungry wisdom.
Lapo. Nay, by your leave; for mobs are swayed with catchwords:
Catchwords are seed, and history is the harvest.
But sowers must be paid,—my function. Thus:
Voices among the crowd shall raise a cry:
"The Frate counts on charmèd frocks, wet wood,
Winds, witchcraft." But the Greyfriars? They are fearless:
[*Laughter among the bystanders.*]
Nay, that the flames may fiercelier burn, they ask
Gunpowder! Oil! [*Continued laughter.*]
Stout Greyfriars! Dastard Frate! . . .
Next, roll the barrels out: the crowd take fright;
And in the stampede, sirs, we gain our distance.

Then, Capitano, hedge our ring with spears ;—
No need to drag Fra Rondinelli forth :
Now any pigeon serves to face your crow ;
" Behold," they'll cry, " The brave man for the Trial."
You comprehend me, Signors ?

Dolfo. That is well.

Lapo. Caw crows,—coo pigeons ! None shall hear their gabble.

All's dumbshow to the crowd—this only clear :
There is delay ; the Frate shirks the powder :
What proof more sure ? We roll the casks away !

Dolfo. Oho !

Cei. Aha !

Mazzinghi. Yes,—roll the casks away.

Lapo. He fools, he cheats us, honest citizens !
Hell's loose. Now Capitano, give the word :
Withdraw your guard : the Trial by Fire is closed,—
Suddenly, Signors, at a sign arranged.
The mob will do the rest. You comprehend me ?
An end to the Frate, and no murder done :
Merely some casks rolled to and from the pile.

Alberti. Hush ! . . . Messer Cini.

Mazzinghi [*aside to Lapo*]. One of the Eight; knows nothing;
Opposes on the Council. . . . Come : this way.

Cini approaches and accosts Alberti. Mazzinghi, Lapo, Cei and Dolfo retire in company.

Cini. Messer Alberti, what is this I hear ?

Alberti. Nothing but what, as one of the Eight, you know.

Cini. The braggart Friar who egged us to this crime,
Fra Rondinelli, skulks. Then, close the Trial.

Alberti. Nay, how, my friend ?

Cini. Ask not the " how," but do it.
For this man saved the city.

Alberti. Grant it, Signor.
But he consents. He claims a prophet's power.
We put the claim to trial. What more just?
Cini. A barbarous trial—a black, a brigand's justice.
Alberti. Friend, hast thou seen a rabble baulked of sport?
Cini. Aye, and a thousand would not make me play
The Judas to a Saint.
Alberti. Saint if you will:
We must be rid of him: Rome asks it, Cini.
We have been ruled too long by paternosters.
Now look you where it leaves us: Pisa lost;
Rome, Venice, Naples, Germany, Spain and Milan
In league against us; commerce in decline;
The city interdicted. Friend, I say,
With the small key of this man's life we open
To our arms the gates of Pisa and Leghorn,
To our flagging trade the ports of half the world,
And Heaven to every dying citizen
Sped by the Pope's writ to the eternal fire.
Better it is to doom one guiltless man
Than to embroil a city.
Cini. Man, thou liest:
Justice is more than thou or I or Florence.
Thy dastard's betterment would make this town—
This Tuscan Paradise of enchanted towers—
Kennel a race of coystrils. When to this
A nation falls, her freedom is foredoomed,
Dead at the very core, whose nerve and pulse
Was justice, fervid, passionate, intense.
Pause not to rivet gyves on such a race:
Its blood, its brain, the milk within its breast,
Begets, in thought and deed, slaves, harlots, despots.
Alberti, art thou stubborn?

Alberti. The city's good
Demands it, Signor.
Cini. Then, go tell the Eight
That Cini sits not at the shameful board
With six Iscariots and a Pontius Pilate.
Messer, enough! I have done with thee! farewell!

Exit. Enter Secretary. Mazzinghi and Lapo follow.

Secretary. My lord, your fellow Magistrates await you.
Mazzinghi. Our plans are laid; the pageant may begin.
You will preside?
Alberti [*mechanically*]. The city's good demands it. . . .
Yes, yes—the city's good.
Mazzinghi. Carp, quibble, browbeat—
Dance to the tune that Mariano pipes.
Meanwhile—the powder—oil.—You understand.
All is arranged.
Alberti [*suddenly*]. I will have none of it.
It irks my soul. This is a just man.
Mazzinghi. Prithee?
Alberti. The plot is yours: speak, Messer, you; for me,
I wash my hands of it; I hold aloof.
Mazzinghi. What, you, our chief?
Alberti. Ebbene; I will sit:
Session is not assent. This deed is yours.

Lapo [*steps forward briskly and addresses the crowd*].
People of Florence, my fellow-citizens,
The trial will now begin. I pray your reverence,
As before Heaven whose fiat we invoke:
Also pay heed to your own safety. Sirs,
Conning the mighty issues of this trial,
And how a specious victory may be won

By a breeze that parts the flames, a sudden shower,
Or failure of the fuse—Fra Rondinelli,
The fearless champion of our Holy Pope,
Asks that for certitude the pile should bear
Gunpowder, oil, pitch, resin——

A murmur of alarm among the crowd.

Have no fear;
As yet, my friends, the powder is not placed. . . .
Whether the Frate, whom may Heaven protect,
Will brave the harsher test, that, sirs, I know not.
Gods that can save from fire, can save from powder:
But he, perhaps, sets store by other aids.
Messers, we soon shall see. The trial begins.
A fierce burst of the flames, a sudden crash,—
The tongue, the doom of Heaven: God's voice has spoken!
Does God condemn the Pope? He saves the monk.
Behold, our Frate on the Loggia steps
Unsinged, unsmoked, holding the cross aloft!
He is a prophet! Follow him to the death.
But if he shrink, evade, or dare and die,
It is a charlatan! Have done with him!
Back to your trade, and to the Church's bosom . . .
Make way! See, fellow-citizens, the powder!

Four barrels are rolled in, marked severally "Pitch," "Oil," "Resin," "Gunpowder." The crowd retires with precipitation, leaving a large clear space round the pile, which is immediately occupied by Dolfo's men-at-arms. Mazzinghi, as Lapo retires, hands him a bag of money.

Lapo [*joining Cei*]. Come, Messer Cei, hast thou thy lute in tune?

Cei. And thou? Hast thou thy wallet filled?

Lapo. With gold

Enough to make the city sing.

Cei. Then come.

Exeunt. Enter, in the gowns of office, the Eight Magistrates [*Otto di Guárdia e Balía*] *with their Secretary and a Herald, Cini being absent. They ascend the large rostrum. Alberti takes the head place. Next to him sits Mazzinghi. Around this rostrum are placed a guard of men-at-arms. Enter, thereafter, Fra Mariano and two other greyfriars. He ascends one of the smaller rostra.*

Loud chanting from without:

Exsurgat Deus, et dissipentur inimici Eius,
Et fugiant qui oderunt Eum a facie Eius;
Sicut deficit fumus deficiant,
Sicut fluit cera a facie ignis,—
Sic pereant peccatores a facie Dei!

Enter lastly, in procession, Fra Domenico in a cope of red velvet, bearing a great cross; by his side Savonarola carrying the Host; and Fra Silvestro, followed by numerous other Blackfriars. The three first enter the second small rostrum opposite Fra Mariano. The other Blackfriars stand grouped at a respectful distance; one at the forefront, of youthful appearance, betrays under the guise of a young Monk the features of Laodamia.

Secretary [*reading in official tones*].

Whereas the reverend Prior of St. Mark's,
Fra Jerome, hath maintained seven several theses
Touching our holy church; and thereanent
Fra Rondinelli, a Minim Friar, affirms
That these said theses err and promulgate,
To the offence and scandal of all simple souls,
A heretic cause against our Holy Pope;
Whereas, withal, Fra Rondinelli hath,
Pursuant to ancient statutes of this state,

Challenged to a trial by fire, and boldly vowed
With any champion of Fra Jerome
To enter side by side the flames ; and lastly
Whereas Fra Dominic, a Major Friar,
Doth duly accept the challenge as aforesaid :
Now by our respectable Lords and Magistrates
It is decreed the trial shall take place,
And Heaven shall witness which of these be true :
And if the said Fra Dominic shall burn,
Fra Jerome shall be banished from this State,
And to the sentence of the Pope delivered,
And may the Lord have mercy on his soul.

Herald [*blows a blast of his trumpet*].

Dominic, art thou here ?

Fra Domenico. I am.

Herald. Come forth :
Prepare to stand within the flaming pile.

Fra Domenico. Aye, by the mercy of our blessed Saviour,
I am prepared. My body to the flames
I do consign ; not doubting that my Lord
Will save me as in holy Daniel's time
Sidrach was saved ; that lust and fraud and lies
May perish from His Church, and God Himself
In our dear brother Jerome's words and works
Be unto all the world made manifest.

Herald. Rondinelli, art thou here ?

Fra Mariano. He is.

Herald. Come forth :
Prepare to stand within the flaming pile.

Fra Mariano. Magnificent Lords, my brother rests within,
Expectans Dominum.

One of the Eight leans over with his hand to his ears to catch the phrase.

Waiting God, my lord,—
Humble, convinced of his unworthiness,
Not drunk with vaunt and bluster like as these,
Yet, like Empedocles on Etna's brink,
Fearless and——

Suddenly flings his arms out fiercely toward Fra Domenico.

Ha! Avaunt Sathana! See!
A fraud! A trick! That red frock is bewitched!
Let him be stripped, I say!

Fra Domenico. Sirs, it is false!

Mazzinghi. Your hesitance attaints you of the charge.
Prithee comply.

Fra Mariano. Tut! in the name of justice
I ask it.

Savonarola [*to Domenico*]. Change it, brother, if they will.

Beckons. Laodamia disguised as a young Monk comes forward eagerly.

Laodamia. Father, for your sake, yes, I walk the flames.

Savonarola. Alessandro, is it thou? We ask your frock:
Change it with brother Domenico.

Laodamia [*ruefully*]. But, father——

Savonarola. Enough! The flames shed lustre on your soul:
Go do the lesser service and content thee.

Exit Fra Domenico with the young Monk. Savonarola and Silvestro kneel in prayer; the Eight lean to one another and discourse in undertones, smiling at times. Meanwhile on a balcony in the rear enters Cei masked as a fiend, lute in hand, clad in scarlet; with horns, mock hooves, and a tail.

Cei [*singing, with a mysterious note of deprecation in the "Aha!"*].

Now Satan hath his jacket back !
Aha ! Aha !
In witches' blood he dipped the sack,—
No burning that ! But now, alack,
" Papa ! Papa ! "
Cries Frate " Must we fry ? "
Saith Satan " So do I."
Aha ! Aha !

Fra Domenico reappears in the usual black frock of his order. Laodamia disguised as the young Monk is now clad in red.

Mariano. Aha ! [*Crosses himself.*]

Mazzinghi. What now ?

Fra Mariano. Sacrilege waits on witchcraft.
See, my lords, see ! They burn the blessed cross !

Mazzinghi. Nay, certes, there you wrong them.
[*To Savonarola.*] That, good father,
Goes not to yonder pile, as shall we say,
Libidinous pictures, false hair, bangles, trinkets,
The like of which ye burnt two Lents ago,—
All in one Bonfire on this same Piazza,—
Your " Vanities " forsooth ?

Savonarola. Not so we bear it,
But even as those who call on God, and say :
To us, O Lord, weak sinful men is given
This mighty charge, to save a world that sails
Down on a weltering tide of Lies and Rapine,
Wherein all bounds of Right are washed away :
And now behold they have us by the throat,
They thrust us rudely to the flames and cry :
" Show us a miracle, or else, pardee,
Well may we know that pope and prince are wise :
There is no good nor evil : teeth and talons,—

These be the only right: Truth, Justice, Love,
Are old wives' fables, coined belike by the weak
To save them from their rightful lords the strong;
And yet, ha! ha! if haply this your God
Save ye from fire, then will we do him honour."
Thus do they laugh, O Lord: whence now we cry:—
"Shine in the flames that wrap us round, O Cross!
A beacon lest the Great Ship of this World
Should crash in darkness upon sunken rocks."

Fra Mariano. Specious and hectic! Hear, O Lords, calm reason!

Did not great Pallas by her emblem save
The city Troy, though doomed by Helen's rape?
But when they snatched the emblem, Troy was burnt.
Ergo, the Gods despite this Hydra's guilt
Will, for their emblem's honour hold him safe.
Item, he seeks to make the Cross a peg
To hang his crimes on, out of reach of justice;
Item, if ye Magnificents permit
This sacrilege, ye try not these said theses,
But God Himself; item, ye stand condemned
Crimine Divinae majestatis laesae.

One of the Eight leans forward, his hand against his ear to catch the phrase.

High treason against the Gods, my lord. . . . Aha!
Beware! Snatch, then, the Cross. Forbid this outrage!

Mazzinghi. Signors, what say ye? This seems reason.

The Eight. Aye, aye!

Mazzinghi. Usher, remove the cross.

Savonarola. Consider, Lords:
We yield the same right to the challenger;
Both bear His Cross: let Christ then judge between us.

Mazzinghi. The Council have decided.

Savonarola. O ye judges,
Have ye not read " In quo judicaveritis,
Judicabimini." A crucifix methinks
Had served ye well in purgatorial fire.
[*To Fra Domenico.*]
Yield it them, brother : we abide their laws :
We are bid resist not evil, save with good.

They kiss the Cross and then hand it to the Usher. At this moment the barrel marked " Oil " is moved from the pile and rolled away. A roar of indignation is heard to arise from the crowd.

Mazzinghi. Most reverend father, see : they grow impatient ;
Meseems you hesitate.

Fra Domenico. No, we are ready, lords :
An't please you, bid Fra Rondinelli forth.

Alberti. Say, Master Secretary : but is the Prior
Named in the writ ?

Secretary. Not for the trial, my lord.

Alberti. Then, Frate, keep your cross.

Mazzinghi. His prudence, Signors,
Earns him the right. A prophet less discreet
Had with his own flesh made the rash adventure.

Mariano laughs. The Eight smile.

Savonarola. Nay but, my lords, I stand beside my brother ;
Light ye the flames around us both ; we fear not.
Though, when at first their taunts and challenge fired
My brother's hasty zeal, I said, " Perchance
Ye do not well in this. Shall man declare
God's hours, and importune his arm ? Shall we,
To whom our brother's thoughts are dark, unveil
The unfathomable wisdom of the Power
Pavilioned in the stars ? " But now, O Lords,
Now that ye have decreed this trial, surely

God will not see His cause discomfited.
Yet could ye burn our bodies, scatter abroad
Our embers, char this flesh and blood of Christ——
Holding up the Host.

Fra Mariano. Sacrilege !

Savonarola [*continuing*]. Consume this visible world itself,
Right still were Right,—the central thought of God,
The perfect poise, the keystone of life's arch,
The changeless fashion of the soul that lives.
This burn thou canst not : lo, God's awful shape
Takes of thy flames a raiment for his wrath :
" Clay, wouldst thou pash thy potter ? Shards art thou !
The wine thy life is poured upon the ground ! "
Us he renews with rivers of his love ;
Nor is our witness in the burning bush,
But, in your hearts and ours, the still small Voice.

The barrel marked " Resin " is here rolled away, and another and louder roar rises up from the crowd.

Mazzinghi. Eloquence, father, certes ; show them proofs :
They clamour.

Fra Domenico. Yes, O Signors, we are ready.

Mazzinghi. Ebbene ! There's the pile. This side you enter.

Fra Domenico. An't please you, I say, call brother Rondinelli.

Mazzinghi. He is detained.

Savonarola. His challenge brought us here :
He was to enter with us.

The barrel marked " Pitch " is rolled away, and once more a great shout rises up from the populace.

Mazzinghi. You hear the crowd :
Between two fires, which do you choose ? Bethink you,
Look to your safety. As a friend I counsel——

Savonarola [*to Fra Domenico*]. I much misdoubt me, brother,
Here is conspiracy. . . . Ye lords of Florence,
Are ye as gamesters on the bench of justice
That toss your city's honour and your souls? . . .

The Crowd. Affretta! Affretta!

Mazzinghi. Hark, the storm is rising!
Our power is great in Florence, reverend father:
We cannot curb the tempest.

Savonarola. This is rank!
Where is the challenger?

Mazzinghi. Come! prithee, prithee!
I would not stickle now. These many years
Have ye not prophesied, and fed the crowd
On miracles and portents? Now bethink ye,
The stuff ye gave was somewhat full of wind:
They are ill-nourished, clamorous, hungry, cold:
Their stomachs cry for more. Give it them, prithee,
Or quit us of the consequence.

Savonarola, Domenico, and Silvestro make no answer, but kneel in prayer. The murmur of the crowd is suddenly checked by a clap of thunder, whereat the Monks look up as if in appeal to Heaven, and the Eight show signs of alarm. At this moment, lit up by a sudden gleam in the darkness of the thunder cloud, Cei's figure appears again in diabolic disguise upon the balcony.

Cei [*singing*].

Didst hear the thunder rack and crack?
Aha! Aha!
Old Satan rolled upon his back:
He cursed till all the sky grew black.
"Papa! Papa!"

Cries Frate, " Roll away
The powder now, I pray :
There'll be no trial to-day."
Ha-ha ! Ha-ha !

Rushes out of the balcony laughing loudly. A confused noise is heard from the crowd without, which swells slowly during the following dialogue into a roar.

Fra Mariano. What now ? They burn the blessed Host !

Enter Fra Benedetto breathless.

Benedetto [*to Savonarola, pointing excitedly to the last barrel marked " Gunpowder " now noisily rolled away*].
Look ! Look ! . . .
The crowd is crying we shun the trial.

Savonarola [*with amazement*]. We ?

Benedetto. Take refuge ! Fly ! They say we fear the barrels.

Laodamia [*disguised*]. I walk the flames. See ! I divert them : fly !

Savonarola. What ? Are we actors mumming to the crowd ?
God's eye is on us. We abide their laws :
He only——

The Lords, who meanwhile appear to have been replying earnestly to the protests of Alberti, suddenly rise.

Mazzinghi. Signors and reverend priests, the court is closed :
We stop the trial.

Exeunt hurriedly the eight with Fra Mariano. With a yell, the crowd breaks past Dolfo's guard, which has now given way, and heads for Savonarola. Laodamia and Fra Benedetto interpose. Missiles are flung : she falls.

Valori, with guards, forms a ring round the Monks, and, with the point of his sword, draws a line on the ground.

Valori. Ho there! Who passes this
Shall taste the steel of me, Francesco Valori.

Exeunt Savonarola, Domenico and Silvestro between the lances of Valori's guard. The crowd follow them, furious. Laodamia, clad in red as the young monk, is left lying on the ground alone.

SCENE II.—*The same. Darkness. The evening of the same day. The Piazza is deserted. The rostra, faggots, and staging are seen dimly.*

Cries from without. To Saint Mark's! To Saint Mark's!

Citizens rush across the Piazza with torches. Silence falls on the Piazza again, and, in the dim light of a lamp, a Ladrone, or tramp, is seen prowling among the débris furtively picking up wood.

Voice from beneath the curtained rostrum. Help, fellow, help!
Ladrone. What's there?

Issues from beneath the curtain, Niccolini, once servant of the Strozzi, now clad in the garb of the Frati della Misericordia, black from head to foot, the eyes only visible.

Niccolini. A wounded friar.
Ladrone. What colour is his frock?
Niccolini. Wait not to ask:
Wing thee with pity, and fetch a cloth and litter:
His life hangs on thy speed.
Ladrone. Blackfriar? Oho!
By Hell, I'll draw his leather for his hose.

Niccolini. Back, thief! It is a boy—thy brother: have mercy!

Ladrone. Brother me no damned shaveling brothers, priest!
Pox rot me if the dead guts of a blackfriar
To-night aren't worth a ducat, shrift to boot:
Get thee! I'll end him.

Niccolini. Through my body then.

Ladrone. Hell blast thee for a cursed Heretic.

Niccolini. It is a Strozzi; his life is worth a ransom.

Ladrone. Basta! Thou speakest Tuscan. Come! go halves.

Niccolini. Haste thee, and take the whole.

Ladrone. By God, I will.

Exit. Clamour without. Enter Ridolfi and his kinsmen, dragging Valori by the neck. Niccolini retires behind the curtain beneath the rostrum.

Valori. Loose me, ye bandits.

Ridolfi. Know ye not Ridolfi?
To the lamplight, dog, and look into my face!
There is a smart upon it; dost remember?
Blood from thy heart is medicine to that.
Take this, old hound!

Stabs him in the heart. He falls dead. Silence for a moment. Niccolini reissues from behind the curtain.

Niccolini. God! It is good Valori.
A tower has fallen there!

Cries from without. Niccolini withdraws into the recess.

Voices. To Saint Mark's! To Saint Mark's!

Enter another party of Citizens, with torches, pickaxes, and ladders. One stumbles on the dead body of Valori.

1st Citizen. Sacks in the road: fiends spite them!

2nd Citizen. 'Tis a man.

3rd Cit. Up, bunch !

4th Cit. He's dead.

Ridolfi [*leaps on a log of the pile and addresses the crowd*].
God speed you, citizens.
How goes the siege ? The Frati still are fighting ?
What have ye there ? Bah ! Spare your picks and ladders.
The convent walls are tough, but powder cracks them :
See ! There's an earthquake sleeps in yonder cask.

Points to the barrel of powder rolled to the steps of the Palazzo.

Cits. Heave ho ! We'll blow the Frate into hell !

They roll the barrel.

Ridolfi. Messers, what's here ? A lopped-off branch,—
a limb, [*Kicking the body of Valori.*
Forsooth the Frate's right arm ! Men of Florence,
This was Valori, a pious stubborn man,
Chief of your State, a thousand years ago,—
Last Candlemas to wit——

Cits. Evviva ! Evviva !

Ridolfi. In the reign of Jerome, juggler of renown.

Cits. Down with the Frate ! Evviva Ser Ridolfi !

Ridolfi. Give him his due, he served the snivellers well ;
And, Messers, as I think, he yet will serve them.

Steps down and lifts the dead body.

Come, help me, friends : the corpse would make a speech.

Loud laughter from the crowd. The body is dragged up, and propped against the piles.

A man of weight, forsooth ! Speak, Signor, speak !
Harangue the crowd, protest, declaim, denounce :
" Shame of your sins, ye naughty citizens,
Your wine, your laughing women ! Mirth is crime.
Harry the Pope ; that is the godly sport.
'Tis true we brought the world about your ears,

And snivelled half your trade away; what matter?
Chew ye the cud of Faith, ye hungry cattle."
So would the old hound bark, muzzled withal,
Chapfallen, toothless. . . . Take thou heart, old corpse:
Are there not here ten thousand citizens
Who in your Sniveller see the arm of God?
Well, not ten thousand,—say twice ten instead:
Are there twice ten? . . . Not ten! . . . Say two? . . . Not one!
Not one but knows your Monk a mountebank.
"Yet stay, good citizens, all is not lost:
Still Charles is Cyrus,—he will save us yet."
Softly, old corpse! To-day the news arrives
King Charles of France is dead!

Great sensation among the citizens.

There's Pisa, corpse:
If thou couldst juggle Pisa back again,
Yet might the town be yours: who knows? . . . Thou canst not!
Thy jaws drops down, thine eyes glare heavy shame!
Bah! Then begone, and feed the vultures, corpse:

Thrusting the body forward fiercely, so that it falls heavily to the ground.

See, Messers, see! Toss him across the walls:
He'll plug a gap, and stay the incoming tide,—
How long? . . . Evviva Papa! Evviva Libertà!

Cits. Evviva Papa! Evviva Libertà!

Ridolfi. Messers, your humble servant Gian Ridolfi.

Bows and walks to the Palazzo. Exeunt Citizens, dragging the corpse. A great door of the Palazzo is flung open. The light falls on the recess beneath the rostrum. The curtain is drawn, and Niccolini is seen kneeling beside

Laodamia, who lies as she fell, clad in the Red Frock of Fra Domenico. He holds a flask to her lips. The Eight file out of the open door in state, with attendants bearing torches. The Secretary addresses Dolfo Spini, who is in armour, with officers, also armed.

Secretary. Send them a flag of truce and tell all friars
Now fighting at St. Mark's the Eight of Guard
Are pledged to spare and pardon all the Convent,
If by the last hour of the night the Prior
Fra Jerome, with Fra Dominic and Silvester,
Be, for their heresy, rendered unto trial;
But in default the Convent shall be burnt,
Razed to the ground, and all its inmates slain. [*Dolfo bows.*

Mazzinghi. Stay, Capitano, where is Messer Lapo?

An Officer. Leagues on the Venice road ere now, my lords.
I quitted him at Porta alla Croce.
He said he was a citizen of Venice:
One Machiavelli, a young man of this town,
His pupil, waits him there.

Mazzinghi. What more?

Officer. "We stand,"
He said, "upon the threshold of Renown:
Earth, not this rabble, is the field we sow!
Our Gospel is the grasp of Power and Empire!
Addio!" he cried, then left me.

Dolfo. Ha! I smell 'n!
Had I yon poltroon's head, or he my stomach,
By Bacco, we would crow atop this dungheap.

Mazzinghi. Is not the day with us? Now, prithee, Dolfo!

Dolfo. That is so.

Mazzinghi. Then why take flight?

Officer. Signori,

He murmured of a strange catarrh. "Your winds
Are swift to change in Florence," so he said:
"When they are settled South I shall return."

Mazzinghi. South? Ah, from Rome. We know his strange catarrh.

Dolfo. Gnaf-fé! He shall have cure!

Exeunt. The Piazza is quiet. The moon rises and lights up the Campanile, the Duomo, and the many towers of the city. The distant sound of a tolling bell is heard, and occasional far-off shouts. Then the muffled report of an explosion.

Laodamia [*awaking with a shrill cry*]. Girolamo!

Niccolini. Hush for thy life's sake, Mistress.

Laodamia. Who are you?

Niccolini. Your servant Niccolini once—now God's.

Laodamia [*faintly*]. Are you indeed our faithful Niccolini?

Niccolini. Your brow is wounded: does it hurt?

Laodamia. Ah, no.

Niccolini. Then quickly, come! There's peril, Mistress.

Laodamia [*dazed*]. Peril?
Where am I?

Niccolini. In the square. I found you here,—
Hid you until the streets were quiet. . . . Come!
Now is the time. I lift you. Walk. Now try!

Laodamia [*standing*]. Let me draw breath.

Niccolini. You suffer?

Laodamia. I am well.
O Niccolini, you loved our Girolamo?
Our little Girolamo, Niccolini,—
The Signorina's playmate, Girolamo?

Niccolini. Yes, Mistress. Do not speak. Be calm.

Laodamia [*takes a step forward, then stands suddenly rapt, her arm outstretched, her scarlet hood thrown back*].

Ah, look !
The strange unearthly light !
Niccolini. It is the moon.
Laodamia [*rapturously*]. If I could tell you ? . . . Hearken !
Do you hear ?
The stones are singing of a thousand tales ;
The trancèd spires are choiring to the skies.
Whispers go through them : Oh, they thrill ! they quiver !
Their veins are quickened, and the statues breathe.
A wind shakes all my City of the Flowers !
Know you your gardener ? Sing, Oh sing, my city !
White Peace among the mastiff heads of War,
Sing Campanile ! Now you know our secret !
Niccolini. Come !
Laodamia. Here did he stand ! They rushed at him ! They stoned him !
I flung myself between. What hope from me ?
Then all was changed : a great Light, and a Voice——
Niccolini. The rays fell on you from an open door :
You swooned, and dreamt.
Laodamia. Heaven's door ! . . . The great Voice said :
" I—I am with you even unto the end ! "
All heard, and sank upon their knees, and worshipped.
Built in the Heavens ere time was, Florence knew
Her prophet——
Niccolini. Mistress, do not dream !
Laodamia. Oh, hark !
What is that bell ?
Niccolini. Saint Mark's.
Laodamia. For Mass ?
Niccolini. No Mass
At this hour, Mistress.
Cries without. To Saint Mark's ! To Saint Mark's !

Niccolini. Hark! Hark! They come. Hide, Mistress.

He drags her back into the recess. More citizens hurry across the Piazza. Silence falls again, and Niccolini looks out cautiously. Laodamia continues speaking with the same exaltation.

Laodamia. Ah! Do they rush to see him,—hang upon his words?

It is a city changed! God's Light has risen.
To expiate my sin,—to die to save him,—
Could I have done it. . . . No, but God has saved him;
And he forgave me: into my soul he looked,
Knew me, and spoke; and now by the hand he'll lead me,
All through his city. . . . Hark! What cry is that?

Cries from without. Death to him! Death to him! Let the Frate die!

The cries grow gradually louder and fiercer. Laodamia stands erect in her scarlet frock, her looks changing from ecstasy to an ever greater dread and agony. Niccolini hastens to support her. Suddenly she points with horror across the Piazza.

Laodamia. Niccolini! Our little Girolamo! Look!

Enter Savonarola, handcuffed, and with fetters on his feet. He walks with difficulty, thrust forward between a guard of soldiers. Fra Domenico and Silvestro follow. The Mob cast filth at him, crying:

Down with him!—Death to him!—To the flames with him!—Heretic!—Impostor!—Ha! ha! Give us Pisa! Give us Librefatta!—Give us Sarzana!—Charlatan! To the flames! To the flames!

Niccolini drags Laodamia back into the recess just as Savonarola, passing, casts his eyes upon her.

She falls back in a swoon. Savonarola and his companions are thrust up the steps of the Palazzo; an iron gate is opened; he enters, and it is shut behind him with a heavy clang. The crowd stands hooting at the gate for a space, then gradually withdraws, gesticulating angrily. Once more darkness and silence falls on the Piazza. The Ladrone shuffles across the pavement bearing a litter and cloth. Niccolini peers out from the arras.

Ladrone. Alive?

Niccolini. To hope,—or not to hope it?—Come!

Laodamia is lifted upon the litter, covered except as to her face, and borne out.

ACT V

SCENE I.—*Florence. The Hall of the Greater Council (Sala del Consiglio Grande). Mechanics' tools, painters' cradles and wooden screens indicate that work is still proceeding in the Hall. A group of Mechanics stand listening at a heavy side-door.*

1st Mechanic. What dost thou hear? An awesome moan?
2nd Mechanic [*with his ear to the crack of the door*]. Stay, Master.
1st Mechanic. A terrible praying sound?
2nd Mechanic. Not so!
1st Mechanic. As 'twere
A ghost a-wrastling in the dark?
2nd Mechanic. A ghost?
1st Mechanic. A sobbing as of a wind come out o' the sky,
That's lost its way along thy crooked Calle?
2nd Mechanic. I hear a silence, Master.
1st Mechanic. Give place: I'll hearken.
After a pause: with his ear to the crack.
Thou'rt right: there's nought.
2nd Mechanic. That is as I made out.
3rd Mechanic. May it be often ye have heard him, Master?
1st Mechanic. A matter of seven times, likely. Holy week
They notched his fiddle twice, they say.
2nd Mechanic. That's true:

Giacopo botched their tackle. Pulley sagged.

3rd Mechanic. Their racks be cunning gear to make folk sing.

2nd Mechanic. As I make out there's not much done to Frate
This se'nnight. Likely that's to get his strength
Against they wring his neck to-morrow.

1st Mechanic. So!

3rd Mechanic. Will they not burn him, Master?

1st Mechanic. Aye, they'll burn him.
Kill body first, and then the soul: that's reason.
Hark ye again.

2nd Mechanic [*after a pause*]. So ho! So ho!

3rd Mechanic. Ye fool:
A cat mewed on the tetto.

2nd Mechanic. Hush!

A low sob, subsiding to a moan, is heard.

1st Mechanic. That's Frate!

4th Mechanic [*issuing from concealment behind a screen*].
Ha! ha! ha! [*Laughs loudly.*

2nd Mechanic. Beast Beppo, wouldst thou fool us?
I'll sing thy vespers!

4th Mechanic. Come now! Where be the odds?
My song is good as Frate's.

2nd Mechanic. Nay, for thou
Be'st but the second biggest rogue unhung.

1st Mechanic. "Tol-le, Domine! Tol-le!" That's what Frate cried.
Tol-le's the Devil's Christian name in Hell.

3rd Mechanic. He's cracked his pipe since Santa Reparata.
Lord, how he used to thunder from the pulpit!

1st Mechanic. The sob dies slowly down, to a gurgle i' the throat.
Stop sudden means a swoon: not often that, though:
Your Pope's men know their trade.

2nd Mechanic. They spared his right arm.

1st Mechanic. And must. He were a dry well else, and drawn
For nothing.

3rd Mechanic. Drawn?

2nd Mechanic. What, bones and marrow?

1st Mechanic. Ink:
They rack them till they sign.

3rd Mechanic. Sign, Master?

1st Mechanic. "I, Frate,
Am a false prophet, hypocrite, heretic,
Item, a wolf in sheep's wool."

3rd Mechanic. Signed he so?

1st Mechanic. As 'twere. That rots the withers of his sect.

2nd Mechanic. Likely they put the words in after: eh?

1st Mechanic. No matter. Signed is signed. Now 'tis his friends
That hate him most they say. That irks him sore.

2nd Mechanic. St. Mark's have thrown him up.

1st Mechanic. Like sour meat, certes.
So now the Pope has blessed them.

2nd Mechanic. Greyfriars more:
They be the fattest.

3rd Mechanic. Pope's a rich man, certes.
Think ye he deal in poisons as they say?

Enter from behind, unperceived, Dolfo and Cei.

1st Mechanic. Aye, by the mass: there's many a pretty fellow
He's blessed and said good-night to.

Dolfo and Cei come forward.

Cei. Messers, why not?

Dolfo. Gnaf-fé, why not? All men would kill their foes.

Cei. Sin-weepers, doleful cattle, foes of joy,—

And are not these the enemies of the Pope ?
We will be naughty, Messers,—very naughty !
Good men are grievous : wherefore are ye good ?
Say, art thou happiest singing psalms at vespers,
Or in thy Nita's bosom ?

4th Mechanic. He says true.

Cei. Doth Holy Father grudge thee Nita, then ?
Nay, he is flesh himself : ask Bella Giulia.
Certes, the Pope buys poisons : that is well :
Shall not the Pope kill sorrow ? Joy shall reign.
Dolfo, I am rapt ! I utter parables !
Ecco, in this room the Pope ! In every house,
In every lane of Florence, the Pope ! 'Tis good
To have the Pope in all your lanes and houses.
What does he there ? Is Bella Giulia with him ?
Aye, she is with him ; he will give your ladies
A supper,—a very good supper : that is well.
But stay : what does he here ? I tell you, Messers :
Florence is a shop : he comes to buy a poison :
A drug, a purge, to rid it of the pest.
What pest ? The Monk ! Our plague, our curse, our Conscience !
For peace and Pisa we have sold the purge :
Thrice blessed Pope, piissime Papa !
Hath not the Pope killed Conscience ?

Dolfo. That is so.

Cei. Messers, Evviva Gioia ! Long live Joy !

Mechanics. Evviva Gioia ! Evviva Gioia !

Cei. Sing " Viva Gioia, nostro Rè." Ha ! ha !

Laughs loudly. Then suddenly ceases.

What are ye doing here, ye popolani ?

1st Mechanic. So't please ye, Sirs, we hearken for the music.

Cei. What mean they by the music ? Mine, sweet Dolfo ?

Dolfo. Bacco! What mean ye?

1st Mechanic. So't please ye, Sirs,
Through yonder crack ye hear the Frate groan.

Cei. Know, then, sweet citizens, that music's played,
And henceforth shall ye sing another tune.

Sings, dancing and clacking his heels.

With a tra-la-la
From the gay Papa,
There's an end to the Piagnoni;
And the world shall spin
On a kiss and a sin,
For the gods are the Bacioni.[1]

Bows to the Mechanics, who go out laughing by a main door in the rear. Laodamia is seen crossing the Hall.

What tall pale ghost walks yonder?

Dolfo. Know ye not
Madonna Strozzi? Rich, by Bacco,—rich!

Cei. Then shall we speak to her, sweet Dolfo? . . . Ha!
Vanished into the wall!

Dolfo. Gnaf-fé! It was a ghost!
Come, 'Cecco, come!

Cei [*pausing in front of an inscription on the walls, below which hangs a painter's cradle*].
See, they would paint this out!
Says, Frate built this Justice Hall, sweet Dolfo.

Dolfo. Its walls run crooked like the hogs it styes:
Yon Monk goes straight,—a stubborn caitiff, 'Cecco.
To see a brave man racked, I do not like it.

Cei. Nor I. Yet must he perish!

Dolfo. That is so.

[1] Big kisses.

Enter through a third (side) door Cini and Niccolini. Dolfo and Cei go out by the same exit.

Niccolini. "Deeds burn," he said, "the wings of contemplation:
One fairest face in youth I looked upon;
Since then I have lived to see the face of God."
And when I answered, "None may look on God,"
"Beauty is God," he said: "To Him all love,
All arts, mounts up, but most the art of living."
Cini. Had he a Beatrice, think you?
Niccolini. He, my lord?
He was all holiness!
Cini. Her beauty led
Dante until he saw the face of God.
Niccolini. Dante of triumph sang, but he of failure:
"The canvas of my life is cut across:
God's face I may not see; for such my sin,
God in my pains forsook me."
Cini. Now by the Mass,
Calvary heard that cry!
Niccolini. And for the sins,
His blackest shames our white.
Cini. Let God then answer.
We pay our servants better.
Niccolini. No, my lord!
If life were rounded here, all reckonings paid,
All just, all perfect, Time and the Dome of Heaven
Would shrink to a cabin. Natheless be consoled:
Either the Just Man, life's unfolded flower,
Hath of the All, his parent, nought in kind,—
Either this part is greater than that whole,
This blossom tells no story of that root,—

Or in the soul of things pure justice reigns,
Each sows, each suffers, sole and individual,
As each life soweth, so shall each life reap,
And Conscience, groping darkly through this sphere,
Fed with all freshets from the fount of Light,
Shapes and incarnadines the undying Rose.

Cini. May it be so ; or else by the Mass I swear
Yon Centaur stabled in St. Peter's stall,
Merry among his wantons, wins the day.

Niccolini. Enough ! And now, my lord, one prayer ; one only
Entreat the Council that my brother lie
This last night of his life, not in the dungeon,
Spat on by thieves and cutthroats, mocked and taunted :—
Grant him at least God's silence for his sleep,
And for his tortured frame my knee to rest on :
No pillow for the head that saved the city !

Cini. The Council sit. Mazzinghi's mouth is hard :
I have the snaffle for it, natheless. Wait !

Exit Cini. Laodamia issues from behind a screen.

Laodamia. You asked ?

Niccolini. Not wisely if for you. Go, mistress !

Laodamia. I do no wrong. . . . To see him nevermore :
Ah, Niccolini, no ! I should go mad.

Niccolini. Say " evermore " : thou'lt see him evermore.
Till then be patient.

Laodamia. I am not good : no, no !

Niccolini. For his sake, then !—Still to the man so fond,
So heedless of his cause.—Think, Mistress, think !
He is the world's, not ours.

Laodamia. Yes, he is mine !
You shall not cheat me ! I gave my life for him !
O Niccolini, there is that between us,
My spirit, near his, would fold and comfort him

Although he knew not. So the stricken viol
Feels out and throbs upon its sister chord.

Niccolini. How would they judge him, friends and foes alike,
Were you discovered?

Laodamia. Foes,—they have done their worst:
Friends,—'twas his politics they loved, not him.
You, Niccolini, I, and Benedetto—
We only are left: we three and God.

Niccolini. No, Mistress,—
Many!

Laodamia. Then let them rise and fight,—the cravens!
They sit at home and patter prayers, while he
Perishes! . . . Oh, and is it much to ask,—
This last touch of his hand,—our Girolamo's?
Has sorrow made my visage then so vile
That you, who never said me nay before,
Deny me?

Niccolini. Footsteps! He returns.

Laodamia retires behind the screen. Re-enter Cini.

Cini. They yield:
The three condemned descend the stairs.
Now, at this moment, lest we plot escape,
A guard is closely drawn around the palace:
No man can pass. But here, the Council pledge it,
This last night of his life you are alone
With him and God: their only mercy; take it,
You who have——What is this? My God!

Niccolini. Your eyes
Are fixed; your lips grow white! What terrible thoughts
Clutch at your heart?

Cini [*gazing at the inscription*]. O felon city! Ingrate!
Hearken! These words he wrote who gave our State
Freedom, and builded for its use this Hall.

" City whose King is God, if thou shalt keep
Holy this temple of justice, that no crime,
However vile, may be denied appeal,
Then shall thy stones be trod by a nation free,
And blossom with fair harvests of their toil;
But if——"

Niccolini. Nay, read no farther. When beneath
This writing, he who wrote it, lies condemned,
Traduced, without appeal, before the world,
Guiltless, and martyred by the State he saved,
Know that his soul forgave them all their wrong.
The rest upon the walls of Time and Space,
God's greater Hall of Justice, stands inscribed:
O Florence, thine the sentence!

Cini. Fare ye well!

Exit Cini. A hall porter locks two doors from within, and goes out by the heavy side door, locking that from without. Laodamia comes forth again.

Niccolini. Heaven has decided, Mistress. See, the doors
Are closed upon us both: you have your will.
Vex not with knowledge of your womanhood
The white breast of his soul laid bare to Heaven.
This marriage of your soul with his shall be
Even, as the dead hand of a bridegroom laid
In hers that loved him: thus,—no more. You pledge it?
Have you the strength?

Laodamia. Heaven help me!

Niccolini. Quickly then.

Niccolini draws off his black frock, which covers him from head to foot, save for eyelets and breathing-holes. Laodamia dons it. There is another similar frock beneath, in which Niccolini remains.

Niccolini. Daughter, hold firm your spirit. I go to bring
A shape you know not; one, more ghost than man,
Pallid from wrestle with the world's black sins.
Now is your trial: no sound, no sob; remember!

Niccolini goes to the heavy side door. Laodamia retires behind the screen. Savonarola with Domenico and Fra Silvestro come forth assisted by gaolers. His face is turned as he speaks with his fellow-sufferers.

Savonarola [*to Domenico*]. Nay, brother; no harangue; but bear all meekly,
As did our Lord, lest strife ensue and bloodshed.

Domenico and Silvestro. Brother, we will, we will!

Savonarola. And since, in torture,
(God knows my fall, and shall not you, my brothers?)
Since in the frailty of my flesh,—for well
Ye know my body is weak,—since then I uttered
Somewhat against our cause, soon reaffirmed,—
Some doubts of God's upholdings in this work;
And sorely I fear for this that God forsakes me:
Pray for me, brothers!

Domenico and Silvestro. We will! . . . Thy benediction!

Savonarola. I am all shame, — no longer worthy, brothers.

Domenico. God pardoned Holy Peter, who denied him,
Suffering no agony.

Savonarola. True, and ye pardon:
Christ's love is more than ours. Then, in God's name:

They kneel, and with them Niccolini. He lifts his right hand.

Benedicat vos Omnipotens Deus, Pater et Filius, et Spiritus Sanctus. Amen.

All. Amen !

Exeunt Fra Domenico and Silvestro. Niccolini remains with Savonarola, whose face is still turned away.

Niccolini. Father, thou art weary : rest upon my knee.

Savonarola. Christ bless thee for the thought.

He kneels in prayer.

Niccolini. Stay but one moment.

He retires behind the screen. Laodamia, disguised, comes forth in his place, bearing a mat. Savonarola rises and with difficulty walks toward her. A faint cry escapes her. He pauses and looks up at his inscription on the wall ; then in deep resonant accents :

Savonarola. Jerusalem ! Jerusalem ! Thou that killest the prophets,
And stonest them that are sent unto thee,
How would my Lord have gathered thy children together,
Even as a hen her brood beneath her wings !
Ye would not ! Lo, your house is left unto you
Desolate !

Laodamia seats herself on a step, and spreads out the mat ; he lays his head mutely upon her knee. The lights in the hall are extinguished. He sleeps. The curtain descends. It rises again. The dim rays of early dawn fling a cold light on the two figures. He is still sleeping. The doors are flung open. Enter gaolers and men-at-arms.

Gaoler. Up, dog ! Sorcerer, wake thee. Come and burn !

Savonarola rises.

Savonarola. Christ keep thee, brother. I have slept ; and youth

And hope came back to me ; and it was well.

He is rudely jostled out between the gaolers. The two black figures pass out unnoticed.

SCENE II.—*Florence. The front of the stage is occupied with the Loggia (or Portico) dei Lanzi. The rear is concealed by a great curtain. But, on the right-hand corner, a vista is exposed of the Ringhiera (or Platform) in front of the Palazzo Vecchio. A Mechanic is placing the seats under the direction of the Secretary. Enter Mazzinghi.*

Mazzinghi. Good-morrow, Master Secretary.

Secretary. Good-morrow.

Mazzinghi. A fair May morning, is it not ? Heaven smiles
To see the winter banished from our State.
There is a sea beneath us, and the waves
Are reeky heads.

Secretary. So dense the crowd, they say
Many will be crushed.

Mazzinghi. Faugh ! How they smell, yon cattle !
Strew perfume lest the nauseous odour grieve
The delicate nostrils of the Holy Office.

Secretary. Certes, my lord, to-day should Rome smell roses.

A messenger hands a letter to the Secretary : he opens and glances at it.

This from the Signor Strozzi : he asks a seat,
And leave, by right of age and rank, to speak
Before the notables and Papal Envoys.
Is it your will to grant it ?

Mazzinghi. What think you ?
He is revered. A word from him might scotch

What reptiles of the Frate's faction lurk,
Whetting their fangs to strike us.
Secretary. Doubtless, Signor,
If to that end he speak.
Mazzinghi. Nay, that is certain :
Grey hairs are never zealots, nor the rich
Prone to stake fortune on the die of treason.
Secretary. Last night I was at Michael Angelo's.
Being esteemed a judge of art, my lord,
The illustrious sculptor craved my help and counsel
On certain figures. Admirable, Signor.
And, by the way, he took the leave to show me
The Strozzi's famous mantello of state :
A Pantheon in silk, repaired, he said,
For this occasion.
Mazzinghi. I have heard of it.
Secretary. Giotto, Ghiberti, Luca and Botticelli,
Figured its woof with all the city's story
Ere Angelo's eyes beheld it ; and, says he,
Never has any Strozzi worn the robe
Save for the utterance of a pregnant speech
To mark the bright and memorable day
Wherein our commonwealth is magnified.
Mazzinghi. Ebbene ! This confirms me. Grant his wish.
Place here a chair of state to fit his rank.
Pointing to the curtained corner in the Loggia.
Ebbene, I say : for does not all go well ?
What better auspice than that this old lord,
Eldest and most revered of all the city,
Comes to the burning, flames out at the close
In all the lustre of the antique robe,
Lending to our masterstroke of policy
The weight and sanction of his ancient house ?

Secretary. Ah, truly !

Mazzinghi. Prithee, Master Secretary,
And whose is this pavilion ? *Moving down the Ringhiera.*

Secretary. Please, my lord,
The Papal Envoy's.

Mazzinghi. So ! And he tops us all.
Rome has our homage : we are paid to kneel.
And these ?

Secretary. Alberti's seat, and yours, my lord.

Mazzinghi. But why this curtain ?

Secretary. The ladies asked it, Signor :
They strip the Frate.

Mazzinghi. Behold, ye gods and gamins,
A monk to laugh at, and a world that laughs !
But yesterday his frock was Cæsar's purple.

Secretary. Indeed, there will be sport. The crowd is merry.

Mazzinghi. As for the ladies, Master Secretary,
They begged a curtain,—they will steal a chink.

Secretary. Hence to the chieftains of my chiefs I bow ;—See here !

Mazzinghi [*peering through the arras, which discloses a view of the Piazza and a scaffold*].
Ebbene ! . . . Hä ! what's yonder ? Behold !
Now by my head, wouldst make this place a Golgotha ?
Messer, you mock us.

Secretary. I, my lord ? Indeed
I have done nothing. Here is the artisan :
Ask him.

Mazzinghi [*pointing through the curtain*]. What call ye that ?

Mechanic. So please my lord,
A scaffold.

Mazzinghi. It is a cross.

Mechanic. That's as they say.

Mazzinghi. They must not say it: the structure must be changed.

Mechanic. So please my lord, there be some things ye may,
And some ye may not do.

Mazzinghi. Truce o' thy riddles!
Change it, and quickly. Time will overtake us.

Mechanic. We tried, so please my lord.

Mazzinghi. How tried?

Mechanic. We hacked her.

Mazzinghi. "Hacked," fellow,—"hacked"?

Mechanic. Against it be a witch.
No telling what they'll get inside.

Mazzinghi. Thou blockhead!
Didst thou not build that bungle up thyself?

Mechanic. Natheless, she be alive, and hath a mother:
Angelo, the sculptor, saith it: that is strange.
In Judee dwelt her dam.

Mazzinghi. He fools thee, fellow.
It is a thing of wood and ropes and rivets.

Mechanic. And if the blessed wafer turn to flesh,
May not your timber? Sure, she cried i' the night
Like a woman in her pangs; and, so it please ye,
They say she'll breed, and gibbets fill the land.

Mazzinghi. Gibbets to hang thee, dolt. Cut off the top.

Mechanic. So please my lord, and where shall Frate hang?

Mazzinghi. Remove one arm then.

Mechanic. Be there not three to drop?

Mazzinghi. Add flanks or flanges.

Mechanic. Crowd be there, my lord.

Enter Alberti.

Mazzinghi [*to Mechanic*]. Fool, thou shalt pay for this.
Remove those seats:

They are too crowded.

Secretary. Signor, by your leave,
The Papal Envoy here unfrocks the Frate:
Shame's edge is sharpest there: all eyes must see it.
'Tis half the pageant.

Mazzinghi. Ten feet serves for that.

Secretary. But, Signor, by your leave, the rule of Art
Is to enhance with room and isolation
The central figure in your canvas.

Mazzinghi. Prithee!
In whose bottega hast thou studied art?

Secretary. The painter Ghirlandajo in his fresco——
Ah, pardon!

Betrays embarrassment.

Mazzinghi. What fresco?

Secretary. "Hail, King of the Jews!"

Mazzinghi. Messer, do you jest with me?

Secretary. No, Signor, no!

Mazzinghi. Christ stripped of raiment: Ha! I know the daub!
Here Pilate sits: Alberti, thou! And here
Caiaphas,—my seat,—own it traitor!—mine!

Secretary. My lord, I had no thought of this.

Mazzinghi. Thou caitiff!
Wouldst charge it on my conscience? It is false!

Alberti. Did I not warn thee? Also in the night
My wife woke shrieking: "Ah! The Cross! The Cross!"
She dreamt a great Cross hung above the city,
And thereupon, colossal, menacing,
One crucified: His vasty shadow lay
Huge on our streets, and, as the sun went down,
Darkened all homes; and folk ran to and fro,
And leant and listened in the mart and churches,

Hearing the footfalls of a host unseen,
That from our trade, our crafts, our freedom, plucked
The core, and in the socket sowed a blight,
Which bred——

Mazzinghi. Basta! to work! This thing is done.
Though yonder gibbet hang the Son of God,
This thing is done,—we cannot now retreat.

The tolling of a bell is heard.

The bell! Move on! We dally.

Alberti. Aye, move on!
Behind a ruin, and in front a hell.

As they are about to go out enter Cei.

Mazzinghi. Ho, 'Cecco, welcome! On the day of trial
Ye sang a lullaby to calm the crowd:
See, man, a cross up yonder?

Cei. 'Faith, I see it.

Mazzinghi. Out with thy lute; there's havoc in the omen.
Yon popolani have the ague fit:
Troll them a lay to make Medusa laugh:
Thy maddest freak—thy wildest fantasy.

Cei [*strums his lute a moment; the crowd scramble on to the Ringhiera, and peer beneath the curtain of the Loggia: he waltzes grotesquely up and down singing*].

Now there dwelt at San Marco a Monk, oh!
Who loved not our Santo Papa;
He would sing you a Dimittis Nunc, oh!
In the arms of a sweet fal-lal-la!
Ho the canto, the ranto, the manto!
On the cross for a wager di tanto
He would scrawl you his name with a schianto,—
"I am Jerome, Papa di già!"

Loud laughter is heard in the rear, and the throng scuffles to get nearer to the singer. He resumes.

Now, pardee, and what of this Monk, oh ?
Barabbas we will not release :
The robber shall drink of our giunco,
And we of the bumper of peace.
Ho the canto, the ranto, the manto !
On the cross he shall swing for a——

Ceases suddenly, and with a cry of anguish :

Bianchet-ta !—Ah !—What have they done to thee ?

A beautiful girl is borne on to the Ringhiera, pale and almost lifeless.

A Bearer. Crushed by the crowd who pressed to hear the song.
Cei [*passionately*]. Give her—give her to me ! She is dead ! She is dead !

Drops his lute, snatches her in his arms, and carries her to the right-hand corner of the Loggia, where, spreading out his mantle, he lays her on it, loosens her bodice, and fans her excitedly to restore animation. Her lips move ; he listens. Meanwhile, Ottimati, or notables, of both sexes, troop in and fill the seats in the left of the Loggia. Ridolfi is among them. They converse.

1st Lady. Horrible !
2nd Lady. Dead ?
3rd Lady. Or dying.
1st Lady. A low-class person.
2nd Lady. The Frate's Magdalen, so once they called her.
1st Lady. Her sins are judged. . . . And he ?
2nd Lady. Cei, the Fantastic ; A man of rank.

They whisper, as though shocked.

An Eccentric. The episode, Signora,
Is prelude to our pageant. Here you see
Pan with the pale nymph Echo in his arms.
The hooves in modesty his hose conceals;
The horns are an open secret.
Ridolfi. Cei as Pan!
Ha! ha! To the life! A city Pan, to the life!
1st Lady. Dio mio! what is this Pan they talk about?
Eccentric. A pranksome god much worshipped in the land,
Who capered before Bacchus, which is Latin
For Borgia,—Holy Father,—God of Orgies.
He sees a vision and his antics pause.
[*The ladies titter.*]
Attention, dames! This is a pious rite.
Three monks are offered on the shrine of Bacchus.
2nd Lady. Cieli! The Signor jests.
Eccentric. Believe me, no.
See, Echo dies away,—Pan tears his locks,
Frenzied with grief: behold him!
1st Lady. Buffonaccio!
Eccentric [*his tone gradually changing from banter to a wild earnestness*].
Sweet Echo, cities know thee, and the woods;
The shepherd sings thy name among the hills;
Thou callest answer from the lonely crags:
He scours the rock, he searches not his heart.
Vision and Voice, or dying Magdalen,—
Monks and Fantastics, we all go after thee:
Through flood and briar, through rack and cross we go:
To clasp our bride, the baffling Loveliness;
Whom, when they banish her from fane and wood,
We seek still choiring in the stars of God.
Signore, I am moved: make way; I quit you.

1st Lady. The man is mad.

3rd Lady [*in an awed undertone*]. 'Tis Angelo the sculptor.

Alberti's Wife [*rising and pointing wildly through the arras*].
The Cross ! The Cross ! Did I not dream of it ?
And now behold !

She cries and laughs hysterically.

Alberti. Orsù ! Be silent, wife !
[*She is led out sobbing. He addresses the bystanders.*]
This madness takes her from too much devotion.
She lost a child . . . pray understand . . . and since,
Psha ! It is crosses everywhere ! Poor soul,
She'd see them in the twig that hangs a scarecrow !

Exit.

1st Lady [*peering through the curtain*]. Look !

2nd Lady. She spoke truth !

3rd Lady. A cross, clear as the morning !

1st Lady. He excused himself.

3rd Lady. He bit his lip, and blenched.

2nd Lady. He turned first red, then livid.

1st Lady. All for a dream.

4th Lady. A dream about a cross.

2nd Lady. They call him " Pilate."

4th Lady. And Pilate had a wife.

2nd Lady. And Pilate's wife
Dreamt in the night before they crucified
The Christ.

A sudden horror of silence falls upon the assembly, broken by hysterical sobs. Cries of " The Cross ! The Cross ! " are heard from without. Enter Roberto Strozzi, with Laodamia. He is led to the chair of state. Attention is drawn to his Robe by whisper and gesticulation. Attendants enter and strew scent and rose-leaves before the

Papal envoy's chair. Mazzinghi appears again, and picking up the fallen lute brings it to Cei as he leans over Bianchetta.

Mazzinghi. 'Cecco, I fear these sudden silences.
Here is thy lute: it is a bag of gold,
And every note ye fling among the crowd
A golden florin. Up, man! Sow the air
With frolic! Laugh for thy life! Make revel: else
Yon damnèd Cross may wreck us.

Cei. I sing no more.
She is dead, my Bianchetta, she is dead!

Suddenly springs up and snatches the lute.

Mazzinghi, I will sing,—yes, I will sing.

Sings wildly.

Madness and Death! O Scent of blossoms flying!
Rank weeds and flowers of flame, dead roots and darnel!
Roses and rue! O city mad and dying,
Thou canst not numb our senses to this charnel!

Dead, and the Frate's name upon her lips!
Mine too! Damn them, they prayed for us together,
Prayed while we plotted,—aye, they knew it!
[*Casts his lute on the ground and tramples it into pieces.*]
Break, lute!
Lie on her breast! My heart, my heart is broken!
Ah! Bianchetta!——

Mazzinghi. Shame! thou girl! thou gannet!
This for a chit,—a wanton!

Cei. Nay, Mazzinghi, nay!
The gods have ne'er surprised thee in the dark.

Mazzinghi. Herald, thy blast; Monsignor waits upon us.

The herald blows his trumpet.

Mazzinghi [*loudly to a bystander that the assembly may overhear*].
Messer, it seems the stress o' the day turns mad
Women of both sexes. Natheless all is well:
The hour has struck when Justice will be done.

Enter the Gonfalonier, and Magistracy of Florence, the Papal Envoy, Romolino, and the Bishop of Vasona, with suite. Alberti, Mazzinghi, and the Secretary take their places with the Magistracy. The herald blows another blast.

Herald. Come forth, Jerome, Dominic, and Silvester.

Savonarola enters, bound in chains, with Domenico and Silvestro; Niccolini accompanies them.

Bishop. By the commandment of the Pope of Rome
I separate ye from the Holy Church
Militant and Triumphant.

Savonarola. Militant, yes;
Triumphant, no: that is not thine to do.

Romolino. Let them be stripped.

Savonarola. Nay, spare me this! O spare me!
My King's dear livery, this I have not wronged!

A demoniacal yell of joy rises up from the crowd. Their hands are unshackled and they are stripped of their frocks, remaining clad only in a woollen tunic. Mazzinghi rises.

Mazzinghi. Jerome of Ferrara, Dominic
Of Pescia, and Silvester called Maruffi,
Whereas ye are sentenced by the Pope, and now
To our secular arm for punishment delivered,
We the respectable Magistrates of Florence
(Francesco Cini absent from our college),
Having observed all offices of justice,
And well considered all your infamous crimes,

Do now decree that ye shall die the death
Of malefactors on a common gibbet,
And that your souls be hunted from your bodies,
Banished, and utterly destroyed by fire.

The Executioner again shackles their hands. Citizens leap wildly on to the Ringhiera, and strike Savonarola on the face, and kick him.

Citizens [*promiscuously*]. Show us a miracle. . . . Give us Pisa. . . . Give us Leghorn. . . . Give us Sarzana, Give us Librefatta. . . . Yah! yah! Frate, the devil won't help thee now! . . . Ha! Ha! Ha! Prophesy who struck thee!

An officer drives them from the stage.

Mazzinghi. Now do thy duty, executioner.

Romolino. Stay, Signor! It has pleased his Holiness
Our pious and most clement Pope, to grant,—
Amazing grace!—to these most impious men
A plenary indulgence for their sins.
[*To the Monks.*] Do ye accept this pardon?

Savonarola. It is well.

Romolino turns with a look of triumph to the Magistracy, who whisper and laugh. Niccolini presses a crucifix to Savonarola's lips.

Savonarola. Jesu, alone with thee! Our sinful lives
Humbly we fling down at thy Cross's feet,
Thou only hope, thou ransom of the world!

They pass from the Ringhiera, and become invisible behind the curtain of the Loggia. There is an expectant hush. All eyes are eagerly bent towards the hidden Piazza. The ladies in the Loggia peer through the curtain.

Ridolfi. Ladies, by your leave, when I shall draw the veil,
Know that the State is ridded of the pest.

Laodamia [*springing up suddenly; and in a clear ringing voice*]. Girolamo !
Now, now shalt thou behold the Face of God !

1st Lady. Who cried ?

2nd Lady. Hush ! Rich : a Piagnoni dame.

Ridolfi. Ladies, behold ! the ropes have dropped their load :
The flames lick up the offal of their flesh.

The curtain, suddenly drawn, reveals a vast fire, and in the midst a scaffold, surmounted by a large cross. Three ropes hang empty from the arms of the cross. The Piazza is a pandemonium. As the clamour subsides, and the Magistrates rise to go, Mazzinghi is heard speaking.

Mazzinghi. Envoys of Rome, and fellow-citizens,
Now may we breathe in peace. Monsignor, see :
[*Pointing to the fire.*] The flame of love our city bears for Rome !
Florence is proved true daughter of Holy Church.

Romolino. My lord, you are thanked. Pisa is given to Florence,
Leghorn, Sarzana, Librefatta,—all
Are yours; also the tithes of all your churches.

Mazzinghi. Our cup of gratitude is overbrimmed.
[*To Secretary.*] Bid that the venom of the Frate's dust
Be quenched in the Arno; burn his books and writings;
Let Lethe drown the memory of his name :
Let it be flogged from every infant's tongue;
And all suspected of his heresy,—
Let them be shunned like lazars.

Secretary. So it please you.

Mazzinghi [*to Romolino*]. Monsignor, by your leave I will present
My lord of Strozzi, our oldest citizen,
[*To Strozzi.*] Signor, his reverence sees in your white locks
The snow upon the peak of our esteem,
And in your robes our Story in Brocade :
This day shall add one chapter, and the woof
Tell how these flames burn open all our ports :
How, smiled upon by gracious Rome, our Trade
Flies like a weaver's shuttle through the earth :
Is it not well, my lord ? Is it not well ?
Strozzi [*hand to ear*]. Well ? What is well ?
Mazzinghi. You hear their shouts ?
Strozzi. I hear
The rumour of the Avenging Furies' wings !
Mazzinghi. Truly a tragic vengeance on his crimes.
Strozzi. Our Tragedy, his Comedy Divine——
Mazzinghi. A comedy whereat all Florence smiles.
Strozzi. For this soul chose, not power, not wealth, but Right.
Above the reek of yonder pile he soars,
And, with the starry children of the sky,
Shines o'er our shame for ever !
Mazzinghi. Messer ?
Strozzi. We too,
We had our choice,—and prostituted Right
For Riches.——Jezebels, Iscariots, go !
[*Pointing to the citizens as they pass away across the Piazza.*]
Troop to your field of blood, your dogs of Jezreel !
Mazzinghi. Methinks, Monsignor, the old man hath the bile.
[*To Strozzi.*] Natheless, my lord, to-morrow a thousand looms
With busy tongues shall sing a loud " Huzza ! "
Deeming our work to-day the town's salvation,

And the Pope's writ the charter of our joy.

Strozzi. Lo, from the deep another voice shall sound !
Lo, on thy walls another writing gleam !
Mene ! Mene ! Thekel ! Upharsin !
Finished is thy kingdom,—weighed in the balance,—
Weighed and found wanting,—given to the Medes and Persians !
Thou shalt explore a lone, a lifeless gulf ;
Ghosts of thy great shall haunt thee, and thy stones
Majestically mock thy fallen pride ;
Yea, as a king who buys ignoble peace,
Crouching, a slave, among ancestral vaults,
So shalt thou be, O Florence :—dead thy Freedom,
Perished thy crafts ; and if there yet endure
One voice, one seeing eye, one plastic brain,
The offspring of our honourable years,
Doomed to outlive the cataclysmal age,
Hardly his soul shall fashion, hardly sing,
Save but 'mid pillared loneliness to mourn,
Crooning in stone the swan song of our Fate :
Dawn, Day and Dusk and Night one vasty tomb :
Dawn that saith " Wake me not " ; Day tired of toil ;
Dusk glad because of sleep ; and Night—ah night !
When shalt thou rise, my Italy, my land ?
Grateful is slumber ; happiest he, God wot,
Who sleeps in stone while shame and woe endure !
Who feel, who see, once rich, are now most poor !

Mazzinghi. A glib old man, Monsignor ! Who comes here ?
A corpse to dam a torrent. By St. Anna !
We are saved from drowning in a dithyramb !

A pause. Enter Lapo, lifeless, borne by soldiers, and with them Dolfo Spini. His dead hand grasps a bag of money. His face is covered.

Mazzinghi. What! A swashbuckler of the snivelling crew,—
Eh, Capitano, eh?

Dolfo. Gnaf-fé! not so.
Lapo's a great man, Lapo wove his webs;
Also he was a putty-livered rogue.

Mazzinghi [*uncovering the face*]. Now, by my head!
What, Lapo? Slain? By whom?

Dolfo. 'Twas I—I slew him; aye, he hath his wages.
I do not like a man that sells his friends.

Strozzi [*casting off his mantello of State and laying it on Lapo's body*].
Such was he? Then I pray you, citizens,
That nations, passing by, may gaze and learn,
Bury him regal in this robe of art,
And on his tomb inscribe these words: "Here lies
A master brain: plots filled it once, now worms;
A master hand: the gold falls from its grasp;
A craven breast: a sword has pierced it through;
A faithless heart: for this man sold his friends.
Sumptuous he lies; art serves him for a pall;
God rest his bones! His name is ITALY!"

Mazzinghi [*shrugs*]. You have done, my lord? Then look upon your daughter.

Seeing her prone and pallid, Strozzi kneels beside her.

CONSTANTINE THE GREAT

TO

VERNON RENDALL

Lover of Greece, her laughter and her tears,
Brave land that heals the spirit's broken wings,
Where long you wander, washing all your years
From sordid aims with high imaginings,
No token this, no lute nor magic shell
To lisp of her still glowing songs and seas:
One flower I pluck, one fadeless asphodel,—
Her brave, her ever fresh fidelities.

Bright morning isles of Beauty, still they shine,—
Simöis lapt in leaves, and fair Troezen,
And white Colonus where the rivers twine
Whose wave makes wet the jonquil's skirt of green.—
A lone tower rocking with a jangled bell
Upon the marge of tempest tortured seas,—
Who will give ear to this wild tale I tell
Of faiths new-born and old fidelities?

The groundlings pipe upon a scrannel reed;
They fleer at faith, they shriek old virtues down:
You keep your soul, you waver not, nor heed;
Your rock shall grow its own fresh laurel crown.
Come chance, come change,—time sifts and chooses well;
Still old loves lighten, still the old hopes ease;
The city spreads, but not the citadel,—
The firm, the brave, the fair fidelities.

PERSONS

CONSTANTINE AUGUSTUS, THE GREAT.
CRISPUS, *his son—afterwards the Cæsar.*
MAXIMIAN, *abdicated Augustus.*
LACTANTIUS, ATHANASIUS, } *Christians.*
PERDIX, PANTOLABUS, } *priests of Dēmeter.*
FABIUS, *a rich Roman.*
A SLAVE DEALER.
BOMBO, *Fausta's slave.*

FAUSTA AUGUSTA, *wife of Constantine.*
MINERVINA, *divorced wife of Constantine*
THEONA, *a slave girl.*
EUPHROSYNE, *attendant on Fausta.*
LALAGE, *a child, daughter of Bombo.*

Secretaries of Constantine and Maximian; officers and soldiers of the legions of Constantine; Conspirators hired by Maximian; Rustics; Dancing-girls; a Physician, etc.

SCENES

MINERVINA TRAGEDY

ACT I

DIANA'S WOOD: DAY.

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ACT II

DIANA'S WOOD: NIGHT.

Several years' interval.

CRISPUS TRAGEDY

ACT III

TEMPLE OF DEMETER: (*a*) without; (*b*) within.

ACT IV

WITHIN THE TEMPLE.

Time: circa A.D. 325.

ACT I

SCENE.—*A wood on a hill-top in Provence* (*Gallia Provincia*); *on the left, a fountain with a statue of Diana. Enter Lactantius and Athanasius, dressed soberly as Christians.*

Athanasius. That dame in homespun once the emperor's mate?
What, and the cub his firstborn?
Lactantius. Sure as the cross!
Still comely; but there's evening in her eyes.
This was the wife he put away to wed
The old emperor's daughter.
Athanasius [*scornfully*]. Wife!
Lactantius. True wife and lawful.
The tug of empire snapped, they say, a bond
Perfect in both.
Athanasius. She did no sin, then?
Lactantius. None.
He sold himself to Fausta for a crown.
Athanasius. Let blame who will, he rules with righteousness.
Was she of the Faith,—orthodox, pious?
Lactantius. No;
Yet strung to a lofty music: such a harp
Needs but the Harper. Constantine she worshipped;
Nay, when the first wild grief was passed, they say

She less repined than gloried that his light
Left dark her hearth to illumine all the world.
Athanasius. So! They have been in hiding?
Lactantius. Many years.
The boy was but a weanling when I knew her;
Yet large in destiny,—a mark for hate,
Had she exposed him. Now are his perils past,—
Maximian's day being done.
Athanasius. Be sure she knows it,
And looks to Constantine to right her wrongs.
Lactantius. He may. Who knows? The passions of the past
Die not in lofty souls, but brood and dream
Like Alpine lakes, deep shadowed, locked with ice.
If some warm memory should loose that flood
Fausta may stretch her little hands in vain. . . .
See, here they come! How pale her aspect!—Christ!
The purple upon his robes came from her heart!

They pass on. Enter Crispus and Minervina.

Crispus. Ho for the hill-top! Here's Diana's wood;
That is her fountain. Goddess, I salute thee!
A boar's tusk ripped that writhèd oak, I wager,
Centuries since; or did their Gallic priests
Gash it in slaughtering victims? Some folk say
Girls white as snow and heifers here were slain
To Esus, Tiran, Wasso,—gods of power:
These be religions; and the trees dropped gore!
What say you of that, my mother?
Minervina. Son, I deem
The gods hoodwink the world with Death to see
What white things struggle upward from the red.
Still do you spy no legions?

Crispus. None. A rabble
Yonder——
Minervina. Ah,—slaves for sale among the tribunes.
Where the Rhone takes the sun upon its breast,—
What flashes there?
Crispus. Helmets! Bravo! They come!
Not twenty furlongs off,—signs, eagles, engines;
Ten famous legions, and in front the face
That makes each legion ten . . . Mother, what ails you
You stumble; you are pale.
Minervina. No, no! Your arm.
How tall you are! Who'd think that yesterday
You dressed as boy?
Crispus. Your gown's a slave's, I say.
They'll whet their wits on you for ladies' airs;
Aye, and be thwacked for't.
Minervina. No, I pray you, Crispus!
Not without purpose have I sought disguise.
Ask me no reason, dear my son, I pray you.
Crispus. You look a queen for all that.
Minervina [*throwing off her cloak and appearing in the garment of a man-slave*]. Now?
Crispus. No, Herclé!
You'll not go breeched like that!
Minervina. Indeed I would;
And gladder than an empress, seeing you
Stately as Lord Augustus. You, even you
One day might wear the purple. Would you like it?
Fate has its whims like women.
Crispus. That's a whim
Our station spares us, and I thank the gods.
"Ave Auguste!" is a song you pay for
With daggers in your ribs.

Minervina. Yet have you said
" Would I were Constantine ! "
Crispus. In some wise, yes :
Death is for all, and great deeds done must feel
Like mighty wings to bear you to the gods.
Minervina. Wings that the meanest bugler in the camp
May grow ; but we, boy, never. Ah, we live
Too closely.
Crispus. True. For that, I'd join the legions ;
But you would mope without me.
Minervina. Son, your spear !
Behold the hand that taught you.
Aims the javelin at a small tree trunk and transfixes it.
Crispus. Bravo, mother !
I swear no man out-throws you !
Minervina. Think you, then,
I lessoned you to leap, throw, wrestle, ride,
That you should lounge in baths and profligate places ?
Crispus. Nay, troth, but things go hard if I must leave you.
Minervina. Crispus, five masters rule the world to-day ;
And all, save Constantine, are evil men,—
Oh, past all deeming, evil ! Dear my son,
Does not your soul wax hot to think of maids
Shamed, spoiled and hunted,—helpless maddened mothers,—
The world a farm to feed four tyrants' lust ?
[*Passionately ; clasping her hands.*] Oh, there's no honour left
but it must run
For succour to the grave or Constantine !
Would that my bosom were a living buckler
To ward from him the wounds that stab the world !
Would I not give my heart's blood ? Would not you ?
Crispus. Herclé ! but life is sweet.
Minervina. For my sake, Crispus.

Crispus. Well, yes, for you.

Minervina. I take the promise, son.
To-night you meet him face to face.

Crispus. Constantine ?
Mother, you jest !

Minervina. And learn of things you know not.
This letter,—this signet ring——

Crispus [*with amazement*]. Who gave you this ?

Minervina. Take it and ask not. There's no secret 'twixt us
But for your safety.

Crispus. These are riddles, mother.

Minervina. All doors that key unlocks. Go with it, boy,
To Constantine ; I follow as your slave,
Your mother dead,—pretend so : there is reason.
And now she gives her son as legacy,—
All that she has,—to Constantine the Good :
Here it is written so. Give this to him.
I shall stand near, but do you not betray me. . . .
O Crispus ! Crispus !

Throws her arms round his neck.

Crispus. What, weeping ? Here's no jest !

Minervina. Only a great hope and a great despair——

Crispus. I'll not disgrace you, mother. . . . Look you yonder !

He pauses watching a girl who moves, clad in statuesque robes, among the trees in the rear.

Diana's self, I swear !

Minervina. Come, foolish boy :
Watch not ! She'll see us.

Crispus. Why, the very sunlight
Creeps through the leaves and makes delicious sport
Touching her shoulders.

Minervina [*disdainfully*]. Crispus !

Crispus. See her now,
Kneeling,—her face among the flowers, her hands——
Minervina. They must be bound: a slave,—dressed so for sale.
Crispus. You saw her face? . . . That such are sold like cattle!
Yes, I would be Augustus; loose all slaves,
Emancipate the crafts and curials,[1]
Make life like running water, sun-bright, free,
No lovely thing in bondage to the base.
Minervina. Come; this is idle watching.
Crispus. Hush, she sings!
Theona. [*singing; hidden in the rear*].
Deep in the folds of the far Aeolian mountains
Gleamed there a city: ah, Crocus of the morn!
Glad were the folk there, laughing by the fountains,
Bare arms flashing in the ripe brown corn.
Stay with me, pray with me,
Visions of my childhood,
White rose chaplets all shattered but the thorn!
She comes forward singing and pauses to smell flowers on the bushes.
Crispus. Gods! Those fetters! Pray your pardon, maiden,—
Wait: I will reach it for you.
Theona. Do not, Sir;
I doubt me,—for those yellow flowers are fair,
Delicate, shaped like little cups of wine,—
You Romans, you—such things you could not touch
But you would fill them full of blood.
Crispus. My own,
If that would please you.
Theona. No, Sir, do not pluck;

Your face is honest. Go ; I wish to hate
All Romans.

Crispus [*gathers the woodbine and is about to place it in her hair*]. Hate ; natheless I will pluck.

Theona. I thank you ; but I will not wear your plucking.

Crispus. Think me no Roman. Troth, the song un-Romed me.
More of the mountain city ; prithee, more.

Theona. There is no more ; 'tis ended.

Crispus. What, the song ?

Theona. The city.

Crispus. Builded in the clouds, belike,
And vanished when a goddess fell to earth.

Theona. No, but of stone. The stones are scattered,—some
Deep in my heart,—kept there to stone all Romans.

Crispus. Then must I spoil your pretty wrath, and say
I am not Roman. Britain gave me birth.

Theona. Still are you Roman. All earth's arteries,
Her nerves, her veins, run poison brewed at Rome.
So ! Would you hear me sing ? Then will I !

Sings fiercely :

Death to thee, thou hell-bird, blacker than the raven,
Ravisher and despot, doomster of despair !
Death to ye, his Romans, sycophants and craven,
Worms among the mighty, wolves among the fair !
Roam with me, home with me,
Visions of my childhood,—
Goad me till I slay him, bloody in his lair !

Minervina [*aside*]. A madness, Crispus : come !

Crispus [*ignoring her*]. Tell me : who wrongs you ?
I wear a sword,——

A scuffle is heard without.

Theona [*suddenly and with agony*]. My father! Oh!
They beat him!

Flings herself on her knees before Crispus.

Noble young lord! Sweet, brave young lord! I implore you!
Have pity!

He severs the bonds with his sword. Instantly she leaps to the rescue of her father. Crispus follows. A slave-dealer issues from the wood. He wears a long robe with a loose girdle in which is kept a whip and an old laurel branch.

Slave-dealer. Ha! The wild cat! She's at him!
Mnechus chokes!
She wrings his breath out. Maul her not, I say!
Dog! She is worth a thousand Mnechi! . . . Hold!
She's quiet. . . . Mnechus, ha, thou son of a thief,
Thou'st spoilt the play!

Crispus re-issues from the wood; he addresses him:

Pol, lord! The frenzy's nought!
A pretty maid to master; Thasian wine
Tames sweeter for its strength; nay, as to that
I tell thee, lord, for a certain curve o' the mouth,
A marriage o' lightning eyes and little lips,
There's some would give five hundred golden pieces.

Minervina. Come, Crispus!

Crispus. What, and leave her to their mercies?

Slave-dealer. She'd fetch three hundred on the stone. But, Pol!
Her feet ain't whitened yet,—by Mithra, no!
Hunted on the high seas,—edict o' Lord Licinius;
No quaestor's title better; here it is.
The Emperor's warrant: Catch and kill, or sell.
I bought her from the skipper with a herd,
Fugitives, curials. Say two hundred. Come!

And a city rose to save her from the Prince.

Crispus. Maiden, your name? I plight me with the wine.

Theona. Theona.

Crispus takes from his belt a cup and wine flask, fills the cup; swims the fountain-bowl empty in the basin; plucks a bough of myrtle, places it on his head, then stands in front, wine cup in hand, ready to "toss the cottabos."

Crispus. Theona, then,—
Theona fair, my love I swear,
By all our Manës holy:
Now on this throw hangs weal or woe
In fortune proud or lowly.
Come, Venus, with thy sacred dove
And kiss the cup to aid my love!
Dip bowl for luck, spill wine for loss:
Once, twice, thrice for the toss!

He tosses the wine, then runs forward to see if the bowl is sunk.

The throw is clean! The bowl has kicked the marble!
Theona, you are mine!

Minervina. You wrong her, Crispus.
My child, ah heed him not: it cannot be.
[*To Crispus, with sudden passion.*] Blood on your breast!
Gods,—gods avert the omen!

Crispus. Blood? 'Tis a splash of wine. Mere superstition.
I did but toss to prove my love was honest.
As for the fears I take my fate in hand;
I care not so I see the thing is right.

Minervina. Crispus, you know not: you are nobly born.

Crispus. More need for doing nobly.

Minervina. My last day, Crispus!

Crispus. Mother, forgive! The hour has made me man.
This ring in pledge, Theona, that I come
To set you free.

Unobserved by Minervina, he hands her the ring.

The price he asks I'll give. . . .
Come, mother.

Crispus and Minervina go out.

Slave-dealer. "Mother!" He called him mother! Pah!
A mongrel bye-blow, and the jack a jade!
Gone for the gold? I doubt he hath it not.
I'll take the long-beard's offer. Come, my pretty,
What's that he gave thee? I'm father to my slaves;
They love, they dote upon me. Tell me now:
Did not I spare the old man?

Theona. It is a ring:
Will that content you?

Slave-dealer. Thou hast no right o' the ring.
A ring to a slave's a fish-bone for a dog's throat.
We'll make short work of this. Ho, Mnechus there!
Out with thy scorpion.

He shows her a whip knotted with steel barbs.

See, girl,—hooks of steel:
Ten strokes might kill an ox.

Theona [*with exaltation*]. Is death so dread?
I fear it not. Thanks friend unknown, dear friend!
Your ring shall make me free.

Slave-dealer. No, no, sweet love!
Not for thy back the whip. Thy father——

Theona. You,—
You dare to strike him? If he dies you answer.

A cry is heard. She flings herself on her knees, holding the ring up before him.

Take it! O spare him!

Enter, from behind, the aged ex-emperor Maximian, with Secretary; the dealer makes a profound bow, taking the ring at the same time.

Slave-dealer. Hail, great lord and master!
Wilt thou buy slaves? Scribes, eunuchs, virgins, boys?
Such cattle never came to Gaul before.

Maximian. Show me that ring.

Slave-dealer [*handing it to him*]. A rare one, lord.

Maximian [*examines it carefully, looking several times from the ring to Theona, and again at the ring*]. The price?

Slave-dealer. Now Isis strike me blind but I behold
The mighty lord Maximian.

Maximian [*sternly*]. Man, the price.

Slave-dealer. To thee, lord, thirty pieces. Come, now! Twenty!
Bid me lustrate it; it is thine.

Dips the laurel branch in the fountain and sprinkles the ring. Maximian takes it.

Maximian [*handing him money*]. Here, fellow!
Away!

Waves him off peremptorily. To Secretary with tremulous eagerness:

His signet!

Secretary [*examining it*]. Constantine's!

Maximian. Give't me!
And in a fair girl's keeping: mark ye that.
A lie stands firmest leaning on the truth.
Hast tablets with thee?

Secretary. Here.

Maximian. Write, then: and so
That one, not over cunning, might suppose
The hand was Constantine's. Thou canst?

Secretary. Speak on.

Maximian [*dictating*]. Constantine unto——. A woman's name ?

Secretary. Paulina.

Maximian. "Constantine unto Paulina, greeting. Diana's wood, the Province. Prepare. I wait thee. Her we remove before the Nones, so fear not. Vale." . . . Thou'st written ?

Secretary. Yes, lord.

Maximian. Take the ring,
Seal, and then smirch as though the script had travelled.
Come.

Exeunt. Enter, in a litter, Fabius, a little patrician clad in pontifical robes ; with him Pantolabus. He alights with difficulty. Maximian and his secretary withdraw.

Pantolabus. This way, reverend pontiff. Here we see them.

Fabius [*speaks in a weak, high voice*]. Where ? I see nothing—nothing !

Pantolabus [*turning him round*]. Yonder : look !
In front a maniple rides on apace.
By sundown all the legions will arrive.

Fabius [*stumbling on to a slight mound, and peering as if with weak eyes*]. Prithee, your arm, Pantolabus.—Where ? I see not.
Think you the Prince will hear us speedily ?

Pantolabus. Could he decline, most excellent patrician ?
Do not a hundred Consuls, two score triumphs,
Cry in your blood for audience ?

Fabius [*pathetically*]. True, Pantolabus ;
But it all has turned to gout !

Pantolabus. Nay, courage, pontiff !

Fabius. Courage, my friend ? See ! Have I not endured
These two days without bath ; my pastilles spoilt,—

Unguents from Egypt, Syrian nard, perfumes,—
What could a Cæsar more?
Pantolabus. Nay, what indeed?
Fabius. This wild Hercynean Forest——
Pantolabus. By your leave,
A copse they call it,—a spinney.
Fabius. Is it Pantolabus?
Are there not tigers, bears, Gaetulian lions?
I think there are; I doubt not they will leap.
Believe me, but I fear not; let them come!
I shrug; I greet them: "Friends, you wish to dine?"
Bear witness, I have said it.
Pantolabus. Amazing valour!
Rome,—Rome shall hear of this!
Fabius. I think, Pantolabus,
We know to teach them courage. . . . Ha! What's there?
Pantolabus. Where? I see nothing.
Fabius [*excitedly*]. Look! The leaves! They rustle!
Pantolabus. A bird,—a hare,—a rabbit.
Fabius [*terrified*]. No! No! No!
A wolf! A wolf! I swear it! Boy, my litter!

Enter Perdix. He wears a long beard and philosopher's sandals.

Pantolabus. See, there,—a blackbird. . . . Here's Perdix, the magician.
Perdix, well met.
Perdix [*aside*]. What Tiber troutling's this?
Pantolabus. Our gold-fish, man,—our Crœsus.
Perdix [*bowing to Fabius*]. Sir, I greet you. . . .
Pantolabus, I have the very woman,—
One to make Henna's flowers crane all their necks,
And cry "Here's Proserpine!"—Away with Christ!
Give me some pulleys, ropes, dark nights to fix them,

A secret spot, an ancient grove of Isis,—
We'll fly a pretty goddess through the welkin,
Set Rumour breeding in their rustic pates
Of miracles and immortalities
That stale their Resurrection.

Pantolabus. Pontiff, you hear?

Perdix. Two hundred golden pieces,—that's the price:
Worth thousands to your coffers.

Pantolabus. Note that, pontiff.

Fabius. Money? From me? No, no! I am a pauper.

Pantolabus. A wondrous pretty maiden, was it, Perdix?
You heard that, pontiff?

Fabius. Ah! Where? Where?

Perdix. This way.

The child Lalage runs out of the wood and picks a flower. Fabius trips across her.

Fabius [*peevishly striking the child*]. Out on thee, brat!

Bombo rushes out of the wood. He is huge and fat, clad as Silenus, with buskins, and crowned with ivy. He is followed by a troop of girls gaily dressed, and the Empress Fausta, with attendant ladies and eunuchs. Lalage runs to Bombo crying.

Bombo [*kissing her*]. Ha, little Lalage, he struck thee, did he,—
Thou that art worth ten thousand popinjays?

Makes a rush at Fabius, seizes and tosses him on his shoulders.

Up, skinny!—ha, ha, ha!—the little pontiff!

Seats Fabius perilously on a tree branch: he groans with ludicrous alarm.

Bow, Maenads, bow! Behold the great patrician!

Imitating Bombo, the girls make mock curtsey. One gives him a push, and runs away screaming with laughter. He falls. Bombo lifts him.

Bombo. Fabius Quinctilius Cato, heir of Time,
Last blossom of the blood of Ancient Rome,
Hear doom! Whereas he spied upon your dance,
Maenads! Maenads! You hear? He spied upon you.

Girls. Fie! Fie!

Fabius. I did not, please you: I only looked——

Bombo. He looked! He pleads his guilt. Fabius, thou pleadest
Guilty of innocence of this virtuous crime?

Fabius. Not guilty!

Bombo. Worse! Cold to your beauties.

Girls. Fie!

Bombo. This is the doom of Pentheus, King of Thebes.

He leads the song:

The King of Thebes, a cunning hound,
Upon the Maenads spied, oh!
Dancing they came, and whirled him round;
Tossed were the clouds and cleft the ground;
His legs and arms they tied, oh!
Each to a nodding pine tree, bent,
Which backward flew, and the limbs they rent,
And flung them far and wide, oh!

During the song Bombo has laid him face downwards, extended his legs and arms, and written in large letters on the white pontifical robes— "*HIC JACET PHILOSOPHIA EPICURI.*"

At him, ye Maenads!

Fabius. Spare me!

Bombo. Spare him not!

Ha, ha! thou little pinchbeck popinjay:

Thou sum and scum of Rome that's dead and ditched!
O noble hands! They clapped a Nero's crimes.
Illustrious knees! They crawled to a Commodus.
Strap them, ye Maenads, to a nodding pine,
Up ropes, and sow the four winds with his limbs!

Fabius gives a piercing shriek.

Fausta. Sweet Bombo, do thou stop! I die of laughter.
Poor little man! Arise. He will not hurt you.

Bombo. Up! March!

He takes a helmet and breast-plate from a soldier, and, dressing the little patrician in it, marches him up and down with military step; then with a gentle kick:

Go, tell thy friends at Rome that thou,
Being mighty valorous, didst dare to slap
A picaninny plucking flowers,[2] and lo
Bombo, the slave, who snipped a fly and said,
Go buzz and teach Rome courage. Exit Fabius.

Fabius goes out.

Fausta. Come hither, Bombo. Girls, go look and see,—
Is my lord yet in sight? [*Attendants leave her.*

Bombo. What think you, mistress?
A sweet homunculus, an insect Rome!

Fausta. Here comes my father. He will talk, talk, talk;
Most dreadful things! I shall go mad with fear.

Bombo. Laugh, Empress, laugh! Ha, ha! The pinchbeck pontiff!

Sings:

If fiends beset thee, yowling, sighing,
Evil eyes or witches prying,
Dead men's laughter, groans of dying,—
Sing this spell to set them flying:
Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!

Fausta. Bombo, we passed a young man on the hillside,
A slave-thing with him : did you see them, Bombo ?
Bombo. No, mistress. Once thy women gazed and whispered,
And their eyes said " Lo Apollo ! " Whereupon
I looked down on my stomach and was proud.
Think you it was not Bombo that they meant ?
Thus the gods pass us and we miss them.
Fausta. Bah !
Thou canst not tell his name ?
Bombo. I'll cry him, mistress,
Lost or strayed, a lusty god Apollo :
Who brings the same to Fausta shall receive——
Fausta [*boxing his ears*]. This for thy saucy tongue ! I weary of thee !
Bombo. Buzz ! buzz ! Come dance, my dainty Maenads !
Jingle your sistra ; make the lilies laugh !

They sing :

Sing ha, ha, ha ! the gnarlèd oak
Hath tossed his goblets green, oh !
The lowing ox with lightened yoke
Joins in the song of jocund folk,
While Mopsus pipes serene, oh !
And the golden locks with the gold wheat bound
Fly loose as they laugh and whirl them round,
And hymn the harvest queen, oh !

Enter a lictor ; Fausta and her merry-makers display consternation.

Lictor. Way for Lord Augustus !
Fausta [*to Bombo*]. Fly ! They come

Enter Constantine and guard.

Constantine. Empress, well met ! Is Fausta here to greet us ?

Fausta [*embarrassed*]. To look out for your coming, dearest lord;

Ah, you are swift: you take our breath away.

Constantine [*severely*]. Surprised in merry company, forsooth
Are these the folk I bade my wife consort with?
Wise men and matrons? Nay, but buffoons, wantons;
Locusts that foul each leaf and twig of Rome,
And strip the great tree bare of fruits and virtues!
[*To one of his guard.*] Praefect, we will not pass the gates to-night,
But camp upon this mound. Now prithee, Empress,
Wait our return; and goodlier company
Belike shall meet us when we come again.

Exeunt Constantine and guard. Enter Maximian slily. He looks round to see that Fausta's attendants are out of earshot. Fausta is tearful. She beckons to a servant, and speaks with averted head to hide her tears.

Fausta. Go, fellow, call the Emperor's household; bring
Old men and Christians,—Christians plenty. Go!
The Emperor wants his Christians. [*The servant bows and exit.*
Bah! his Christians!

Maximian. What, tearful, eh? Hast had thy fill of love,—
Thy kiss, thy sweet encounter?

Fausta. Sweet, indeed!

Maximian. "Goodlier company than thine," he said.

Fausta. Than Bombo's, father: mirth displeases him.
Oh, let me be! I have no will to talk.

Maximian. What pleases thee—eh? does he think of that?

Fausta. Pooh, no! He thinks of duty; always duty.
As though an empress were a kitchen slut.

Maximian. Yet natheless, Fausta, he can be sweet to some.
His tongue is soft and eloquent as silk.

Fausta. To serve his ends, his politics,—oh, yes !
Maximian. Yet, Fausta, be thou patient.
Fausta. Am I not ?
Here, there and everywhere he hurls himself,—
Swift, hard as stone ; and I,—I must not laugh ;
But mouch, mouch, mouch, with books and grey old men
Blinking like owls,—oh, how I hate them all !
I wish I were not born !
Maximian. Thou didst not say so
Of old, before he trod our necks to rise.
Now are we dirt beneath his chariot, we
Who placed him where he sits astride the world.
Fausta. How you do talk !
Maximian. He sickens of thee, girl ;
So have a care.
Fausta. You always make me wretched.
Maximian. Fine company he'll keep to please himself :
A fair, soft Christian, comely, smooth of speech,
With silken hair and holy yearning eyes.
He ever had an itch for Christian vermin.
Fausta. Bah ! 'Tis no woman's man. You do not know him.
Maximian. Belike ! belike ! We've had some traffic, child,
These sixty years : we think we know a man.
Fine company he'll keep, I dare say : thou,—
Worms and a grave, and toads to sing thy naenia.
Fausta. Oh, you are gruesome as a bishop ! Leave me :
He likes not that I talk with you.
Maximian. What's that ?
He'd tear me from my child ?
Fausta. It is your fault.
You have rebelled : you know it. At least he spared
Your life.
Maximian. My life ! A dog's life, chained ! Let be !

Laugh while thou canst! It may not be for long,
If what they say is written here be true.
Read it thyself; I am no scholar, girl.
He holds out the letter, then draws it back.
No, no, I'll not make evil blood betwixt you.
Fausta. What is it?
Maximian. Nothing.
Fausta. Let me see.
Maximian. Thou shalt not.
Fausta. Show me the seal.
Maximian. Aye, aye, 'tis Constantine's:
We have not fallen so low, but we have friends
To spy upon his treason.
Fausta. What? You stole it?
Maximian. They took it in the mountains,—killed their man;
I cannot read;[3] I know not what it means.
Fausta. I wish to see it.
Maximian. There, then, if thou wilt.
She takes the letter and reads.
Fausta. Oh! I am lost!
Maximian. What says it, child? What ails thee?
Fausta. I shall be slain. O father, he will slay me!
Maximian [*as if deaf*]. Thou wilt be—eh?
Fausta. It says as much; they'll kill me.
Maximian. Eh? Eh? They said it sounded ill. Read, child.
By Pol, I doubt it signifieth nothing.
Fausta [*suppressing sobs*]. "Constantine unto Paulina, greeting."
Maximian [*as if deaf*]. Who?
Fausta. Paulina.
Maximian. Ah!

Fausta. "Diana's wood, the Province."

Maximian. That's here.

Fausta. "Prepare! I wait thee." . . .

Breaks into sobs.

Maximian. They said it held a secret: tush! 'tis nothing.
Be thou not jealous: 'tis the way of men.

Makes as if to go.

Fausta. Stay! stay! O father, save me! Do not go!
"Her we remove before the Nones": it says so.
Father . . . in two days he will kill me . . . Oh!
Carry me off!

Maximian. Giv't me. I grow too old.
My eyes are weak. [*Examining the seal.*]
Methinks I see a mark;
See here: beneath the eagle. It is false.

Fausta. That? 'Tis the mark we know by. . . . Quick,—
they come.

Maximian. What's that they tell o' the wife o' Commodus?

Fausta. Oh, do not talk, but save me——

Maximian. I was thinking. . . .
Your Marcias,—ha! they were cunning wenches, those:
Was there a dagger up the Emperor's sleeve,
They caught the shine and whipt theirs out before.
Dead lions do not bite; nor lively women,
Handsome to boot, go begging for a husband.

Fausta. I kill him? But I could not kill a mouse.

Maximian. Thou needest not. Abed he is not armed.
Just before dawn is sleep the deepest; then
Dismiss the guard on errand; go ye out;
I'll enter; and if he come forth alive.
Then may old Charon have me!

Enter Bombo, slily and with uplifted finger.

Bombo. Warily, mistress,

Here cometh Virtue clad in power and purple,
Awful as Juno in a cotton nightcap!
Ha' done, ha' done with cranks and quips;
King Cacus thinks them sin, oh!
He runs on ice and never slips,
He lays a tombstone on thy lips
And shuts the twinkles in, oh!
But when thou'rt widowed, prithee pretty Empress,
Set free the twinkles, let them loose, like Cupids,
A thousand of 'em, madcap little rogues
Like bubbles in a cascade,—ha, ha, ha!
Else wed thee who may, I will not. Buzz, buzz, buzz!

Hops away mischievously through the wood. Maximian shuffles off in another direction. Enter the Emperor and guard on one side; on the other a multitude of men dressed in the toga or civilian gown, among them Athanasius and Lactantius.

Constantine. Hail, Empress! Hail, my men! You greet us victors.

Loud cries. Ave! Ave!

Constantine. We have laid bristles on the hedge of Gaul:
Back to his marsh the Frankish boar runs pricked;
Gaul basks in peace.

Loud cries. Ave! Ave!

Constantine. And if it please the gods——

A slight murmur among the Christians.

Aha! Who murmurs there? Mark me those men—
And if it please the gods, I say, some hogs
We wot of otherwhere, shall taste our steel,
Or quit their evil living.

Loud cries. Ave! Ave!

Constantine. It sufficeth.

Not for applause we wrestle, but to please
The voice within, the praise that ne'er betrays.
Now to fresh business. There be those that deem
We flout the gods of Rome. They lie! They lie!
What gods are they that make the Empire one?
They are our gods,—the gods that succour Rome.
Stand forth, ye Christians! Who are these you worship?
Fetahil, Buthos, and the Demiurge,
Manee, Pleroma, Ja, Jaldebaoth?

A loud murmur of dissent.

Will ye deny it? Are there not among you
Jugglers with amulets, Manichees, Mandaeans,
Sects that coil serpents round your holy bread,—
Borborians, Coddians, Ophites, Barbelites,—
That quench their lamps and fall to headlong lusts?

Lactantius. O Emperor, it is false! Not Christians these,—
We own them not; they shame the name of Christ.
One God we worship; he alone can make
Rome one. Aye, though to thee we kneel not, thee
We serve: and will; for justly hast thou ruled.
Augustus, try us; we be faithful men.

Constantine. Away with you! Thou, Praefect, bring me hither
The torture engines that I bade thee bring
Against my coming.
[*To another officer.*] Thou there, write down all
Who will not offer to my father's statue.
We will not eat, nor sleep, nor pass our threshold
Until we know the men whom we may trust.

Praefect. My lord and master, the instruments are here.

Speaks to slaves: instruments of torture are brought in; also a statue of Constantius, father of Constantine.

Constantine [*to Lactantius, pointing to the statue*]. Fellow, thy worth is known: kneel there and rise
Praefect o' the Palace; kneel not,—by the gods,
I'll twist and screw thee to an obscene gargoyle.
Lactantius. And is this Constantine? Ah, what hath turned
Thee, the most noble and most just of princes?
Have we not served thee well?
Constantine. Durst question me?
We want no rebel service. Bow or burn.
Lactantius. Then burn we will.
[*Stretching his hands towards the heavens*.] O Jesu, change his heart,
Or keep ours changeless through all agony!
Christ, help us! Help us, Jesus!
Constantine [*to Praefect*]. Heat the gridiron.
We'll baste this braggart first; the rest shall follow.
Lactantius. O Constantine, a many years these fires
Have been a-burning, but in vain; the truth's
Not burnt out yet.
Constantine. We were too swift to kill.
Ply them with water in their throats to keep
The torment fiery and the body quick.
Water is fetched from the well. A number of Christians are brought in.
Are all these Christians?
Praefect. Ask them, Constantine.
Constantine. Knees to the image, or away with ye.
Lactantius [*to the other confessors*]. Oh, this is swift, my brothers! Thus the devil
Comes to the wrestle with a sudden rush.
Natheless please God we'll show the world once more
There's stuff for valour in the Christian faith.

Constantine. Will no one kneel? Down, rebels! Gag that prater.

Lactantius is seized.

Constantine speaks not twice. Kneel now or never.—
Athanasius, thou?

Athanasius. I am a Christian.

Constantine. Thou?

And thou? And thou?

All cry. I am a Christian.

Constantine [*abruptly, with a sudden change of manner*].
So! . . . This suffices. Praefect, clear the ground.
The sieve is shaken and the true are tried.
Now hearken all. Whereas three hundred years
That sophist of the swine, old Epicurus,
Hath made our lives a Libyan whirl of dust,—
No grace therein, no governance of Right,—
Yea, crumbled all our virtues, made us beasts
Scuttling to covert, languid, lustful, base;
And forasmuch as, like the living germ
Whereby soft fruit will wax and break hard rind,
A nation has been nourished in our midst,
A company of fearless, faithful men,
Liege-men of some good Son of Man, some God,—
A soul that touched a truer fount of deeds
Than thine Olympus or the Academy's,—
Therefore we purpose henceforth not to vex
But vindicate this people, and uplift
Their Christ among our gods! Nay, even more:
Fighting the Franks, wherever these Christians went
The foe gave ground. This wondering I beheld,
And lo a ruddy flame lit up the sky
Crosswise, a symbol like their sacred Cross!

The Christians [*loudly*]. Ave Christe! Ave Constantine!

Athanasius. Christ save thee, Constantine! By this thou conquerest.

Constantine. Aha! "By this we conquer," dost thou say?
Such words I uttered, scarcely knowing why.
"By this we conquer": wilt thou conquer, Christ?

Christians. He will! He will! Ave! Ave! Auguste!

Constantine. Surely some god hath led us that our sword,
Our statecraft, all we do and seek prevails.
We will muse more on this.

He paces up and down, then speaks again:

One God, one king;
No more five Emperors and five hundred sects:
One crown, one creed, the world beneath our feet.
Lactantius, Athanasius, do ye think
This thing might be?

Athanasius. Aye, if thou wilt, Augustus.

Constantine. Behold the kingdom that your Master sought!

Lactantius. Augustus, no; His kingdom is within.

Constantine. Thou art a stubborn fellow: nay, I like thee.
But not for me thy creed of many kingdoms:
This man hath gotten his kingdom in a kirtle,—
This in his brains, and that inside his belly.
The million are but fools, the few are wise.
Thou hast a trick of creed that makes for courage;
Take thou a pen and write thy credo down,
Pave thou the Appian adamant of Truth,—
Adown that road my sword shall drive the world.

Athanasius. God guiding, we will do this thing, Augustus.

Lactantius. It may not be; His Kingdom is as seed;
It grows by stealth, it taketh not by storm;
Bind not this quick life with thy bonds of brass:
It wells, it grows, absorbs the old and new,[4]
And turns all life to grace and loveliness.

For in our Father's House are many mansions,
And walls as wide as all eternity.

Constantine. Enough of prating. This at least is plain:
Men that are faithful to the God they worship,
Whom neither bribe nor torture will corrupt,
These likewise will be faithful to their Prince.
[*Rising.*] The sieve is shaken and the true are tried.
To-night our guard shall be of Christian men.

Constantine and his followers file out, Fausta betraying agitation. Perdix and Pantolabus cross the stage, followed by Theona with her father.

Perdix [*beckoning to Theona*]. Come!

ACT II

SCENE I. — *The same. Dusk, changing gradually into night. A tent has been erected, occupying half the stage. At the entrance on a lofty pike is the Roman eagle, and names of legions; within the tent two chairs and a table; at the rear a curtain concealing the sleeping apartment. Fausta issues thence, goes to the door and beckons. Enter Bombo.*

Fausta. Bombo! You heard?
Bombo. I heard.
Fausta. My father too?
Bombo. Somewhat.
Fausta. "The sieve is shaken and the true
Are tried!" Why tried? And why this Christian guard?
Bombo. Wouldst thou I flatter thee with pleasant tales?
Fausta. No, no! The truth.
Bombo. He knows. Beware his Christian guard.
Fausta. Go, tell my father I will not assist him.
Bombo. Too late! Augustus knows. Besides, that letter....
I marked these Christians and they scowled on thee.
Fausta. Why? For I smile on all men.... Save me! Fly!
To Rome! My brother's there.
Bombo. The guilty fly:
Thou art not guilty.
Fausta. No, I am not!

Bombo. Thou,
The pearl of wives. . . . Show me that letter.
Fausta. This? [*He examines it.*
Bombo. Forged!
Fausta. But it cannot be. . . . The signet. . . .
Bombo. Stolen!
Fausta. But, Bombo, thou art sure?
Bombo. No doubt of that.
Fausta. Then am I safe!
Bombo. Thou wert; thou art no longer.
Thou hast conspired, and, as I think, he knows it.
Fausta. No. He would strike; no pause. Oh, he is ever
Swift, swift to strike!
Bombo. Yet wary with his angling.
Not till the net is drawn the fish are stunned.
Fausta. O save me!
Bombo. I see a course. . . . Turn, turn about!
A fond thing and a subtle hast thou compassed,
Fausta, thou pearl of wives, thy lord's preserver:
The hoary traitor thou wilt trap and publish
Red-handed, hot to murder; he shall die.
Henceforth Augustus loves thee for his life,
And for his warrant in a damnèd act.
Fausta. What, save myself and kill my father? Never!
Bombo. What, die thyself and kill thy father? Never!
Fausta. Thou wouldst not, Bombo! Thou wouldst rather die.
Bombo. To laugh a little longer 'neath the sun,
Gods! I would eat my father.
Fausta. Oh, you jest!
For yours, they say, you risked a crucifixion.
Bombo. "They say!" Ha, ha! Knowst thou not Roman law?

A slave can have no father. Therefore I
Had not a father; therefore I could not save him.
Nay, nay; we love our masters, them alone.
Do we not cheat, lie, plot, and make our souls
All maggots for our masters? All for love,
Not liberty nor lucre! Give me, Fausta,
Give me not gold nor freedom.

Fausta. Oh, I will!

Bombo [*suddenly changing from mockery to earnestness*].
Thou needst not, mistress; thou hast ever been
A mother to my bird.

Fausta. Sweet Lalage!
Yes, but a thousand times I will reward you
If only you will save me.

Bombo. But I will.

Fausta. Here comes Augustus! . . . Quick! What will you say?

Bombo. What for thy life's sake thou shalt not gainsay;
So shall I save thee. As for thee, Augusta,
Fall thou to weeping; tis the veil discreet,—
The woman's sanctuary.

Fausta. From fear I shall:
I am right sick with fear.

Bombo signs to her to be silent. Enter Constantine.

Constantine. What now, Augusta?
Tears? [*He looks severely at Bombo.*]

Bombo. Not me! I have not joked this half-hour.

Constantine. Go, fool.

Bombo makes as if to go, but looks round at the tent door, sideways, pointing to Fausta.

Bombo. Her father. . . . Verily he must die.

Constantine. What of thy father, eh?

Bombo [*answering for her in the same sly posture*].

A bad joke, lord,—a bad joke.
That old man cracks the jokes that crack an empire.
Verily he must die.
Constantine. What now? More plotting?
Canst thou not hold him in a collar, girl?
Fausta. O spare him, dearest lord! He is white and old:
He hath not long to live.
Constantine. One day too many
Will make the world a bonfire, and these hands,
These that alone can quench it, ashes. Speak:
Tell me the tale. Do thou thy duty, Fausta.
Bombo [*still sidelong at the tent door*]. She hath no voice.
She cast the net. Her father
She snared to save her husband;
[*Coming forward with a dancing step*] but, ho, ho!
Now the hoc habet sounds, she falters, fails:
'Tis very woman, lord. She'll help thee yet:
'Tis her intent to lure him to his ruin.
Constantine. Fool, thou art wondrous wise in our affairs.
Speak: thou hast leave; tell us the tale; but briefly.
Bombo [*edges up to Constantine servilely*]. Bombo has bees that gather secret honey,
Bees that buzz sweetly round the old man's head;
Yet Bombo is but Fausta's henchman. She
Shall smile him to his doom—a sweet decoy.
Constantine. More plainly, fellow.
Bombo [*grinning*]. Will't please my lord
That some vile slave that merits death shall lie
In Constantine's bed to-night?
Constantine. So! That's the play?
My guard shall see to that.
Bombo [*pulling Constantine's coat*]. But, if it please thee,

A bloody head that might have been my lord's,—
That were a pretty sight to show thy men,
And breed forgetting of the old lord's service.
Constantine. A merry fellow, this. Now, by my head,
Fausta, we'll lie elsewhere: and he himself,
He shall be honoured with our bed to-night.
Bombo [*betraying alarm*]. I—I—Heaven save me. . . !
[*Recovering himself.*] If an old man came
Creeping, decoyed by Fausta—(she will do it)—
Creeping at dead of night, dagger in hand,
And felt up, up [*imitating the action*] unto the beating heart,—
The heart he thought was Constantine's,—now look ye:
It were not well his hand should climb—a mountain!
Constantine. A what?
Bombo. Ye gods that sit on stomachs, lo
Olympus! [*Patting his stomach.*] Prithee, master,—ha, ha, ha!
Hath not my paunch more pomp of state than thine?
Constantine [*aside*]. He fears: the plot is good. I wronged you, Empress:
Your fool shapes folly to the end of wisdom,
And you have served us well. We are saved. . . . Unless . . .
You marked our speech . . . the turn we gave? . . . What? What?
It fetched their plaudits? Genuine, as I think.
Fausta. So please my lord.
Constantine. Perceive that in this business
The army's loyalty is indispensable:
We count upon their worship.
Bombo. Aye, and have it,
Even as the gods.
[*With mock pomposity.*] "Not for applause we labour,
But praise that ne'er betrays,—the voice within."
[*Slily.*] Wilt thou not wear my mask and soccus, lord?

Constantine. Off with thee, fellow: fetch a miscreant slave.
Thou shalt have place and honour for thy pains.

Bombo [*aside*]. So then I erred: he knew not. It is well.

SCENE II.—*The same. Before and after dawn. Soldiers stand sentinel at the entrance of the tent, where swings a single lantern. Fausta and Constantine are seen dimly, seated, Fausta wearing a night cloak, or pallium; Bombo stands listening at the curtain.*

Bombo [*in a hushed voice*]. Now! now! He snores like Vulcan. Mistress, now!

Fausta rises, sighing, and goes to the entrance, then pauses.

Fausta. I cannot! Spare me! It is my father.

Constantine [*sternly*]. Fausta!

She goes out and crosses to the back of Diana's fountain. As she leaves by the entrance, Bombo and Augustus pass out on the other side. Maximian, in full armour, appears from behind the fountain; Fausta lifts her finger to beckon him. He drops a bag of gold in the hands of the guards and stealthily enters. When he is out of sight they grin and pocket the gold. Fausta stands watching him, then buries her face in her hands and groans. Silence for a moment; and now Maximian re-issues. He clanks his sword in signal, and soldiers issue from the wood bearing torches.

Maximian. Prompt to the signal! Now, conspirators,
Sound ye the trumpet; raise the camp: the prince
Is dead.

Conspirators. Ave Maximiane Auguste !

The trumpet sounds. Enter a large body of soldiers. They stand opposed to the conspirators. Swords are drawn. Maximian interposes.

Maximian. Men, spare your blows and hearken. Constantine
Who tricked us of our purple lies a corpse
[*To conspirators.*] Go drag him from his bed, and then to earth.
And voice your wills ; elect a new Augustus.

The Conspirators [*a feeble minority*]. Ave ! Ave ! Maximiane Auguste !

The rest of the soldiers are sullen and silent, looking perplexedly round the tent and murmuring to one another.

A Conspirator [*holding his sword to his own neck*].
By Mars and by thy genius, prince, I swear
To love thee more than life or wife or child,
Serve thee, obey thee, follow thee, and fight
Beneath thy standard, ne'er deserting it,
Save, O Augustus, that I fall and perish.

Other Conspirators. The like from me ! The like from me !

Maximian [*looking to the opposed soldiers*]. To each who takes the oath, " the like from me,"
An hundred golden pieces. . . . You there ? You ?

The soldiers are all silent.

For why do ye pause ? Have ye not marched and fought
Beneath Maximian's eagle, aye victorious,
Before yon pullet, dead and trussed, was hatched ?
Booty or plunder, women, mead or meal,—
What lack ye ? Ye shall ha' it,—by Pol I swear.
Was there not carnage when my eagle pounced ?
And shall be. As for him, young Constantine,
He bragged a score of battles, I an hundred.

Conspirators. Ave ! Ave ! Maximiane Auguste !

Maximian. Truly I doffed the purple, wrought thereto ;
But I will put it on again ; and let
None hinder me, else look they to their necks.
I made and I unmake him,—I, Maximian.

Conspirators. Ave ! Ave ! Maximiane Auguste !

Maximian. For why do ye pause,—you there,—and you ?
Ye think me old,—eh, eh ? Does my hand tremble ?

Holding out a tremulous hand.

It doth not ; yet it is not weak and still
As his,—once hard and swift like crashing rock
Hurled from a catapult ; a fox for cunning.
Lacked I his parts ? Now witness that I stand,
I, I, before you, but that fox lies dead.

Conspirators. Ave ! Ave ! Maximiane Auguste !

Maximian. He tongued me for my age : 'twas time I dozed,
And dug my plot like Diocles, who brags [6]
Of cabbages, not kingdoms. Now who sleepeth ?

Conspirators. Ave ! Ave ! Maximiane Auguste !

Maximian. Come, come ! The oath ! . . . He called me old,
I say.

Re-enter conspirators, dragging the dead body in a sheet.

See here he comes in swaddling clothes, that babe :
He cannot totter ; nay, he hath the worm.
A purge will help him : nay, ha, ha !—there's nought
In him but death ; he cannot vomit death.
Will ye be ruled by corpses ? Take the oath ;
Lift up your hands and vow ye to the worms.
Up there, and show him ; raise the prince aloft.
Lo, what a mighty change is here ! Behold
Lord Constantine !——

The body is raised and suddenly unveiled. The light of many torches reveals the ludicrous figure of Fabius, the pinchbeck pontiff. A roar of laughter, fierce, exultant and prolonged, rises from the soldiers, in the midst of which Constantine himself appears. As he advances, stern and stately, to the foreground, a sudden awe of silence falls; and then a mighty shout.

Soldiers. Ave Constantine! Ave! Ave! Ave!

Constantine [*lifts his hands, commanding silence, then speaks with emotion*]. Thanks! Thanks! . . .
(Disarm him lest he kill himself.)
Our thanks, like fruit, break down the boughs of speech.
This night reveals two shining wondrous things:
An old man's hate that hath the gleam of hell,—
Your love that glows like heaven. Yet mark me, soldiers.
Not that you praise us living we rejoice:
Such praise have tyrants. But above all crowns
We wear this love no bribe nor threat seduces,
True in reproach, unquenchable in death.
Happy is he who, still alive, hath read
His epitaph of love and loyal faith
Writ clear upon ten thousand valiant hearts.
Henceforth not subjects, comrades, friends, we call you,
But brothers.

Soldiers [*with wild enthusiasm*]. Ave Constantine! Ave! Ave! Ave!

Constantine. Now for this sorry deed. God doeth justly.
This man, whom for his brag of birth we gave
Our tent to sleep in, had grown rich by wrong:
He hath his due; God rest in peace his ashes.
Of us the purposed victim——
[*To Maximian.*] Speak, old man.

Were we not patient with ye? Twice ye plotted,
Twice did we pardon.

Soldiers. Away with him! Away with him!

Constantine. Brothers, be patient still. Hear his defence.
[*To Maximian.*] Is it not written in the Roman journal
That of thine own will, having reigned so long,
Thou didst for ease resign the sceptre? Speak!

Maximian. All's truth the victor speaks. Add this, by hell,—
That by mine own will, having lived so long,
I do bequeath to thee, thou damnèd traitor,
My head, and to thy wife the curses in it.
The strumpet's flown: my curse shall find her out.
Ha, smirk, mince, ogle, purse thy baby lips,—
They shall drink gall, their kisses shall be fire;
She shall go breed and litter little asps,
Hiss off her wings in flame,—that moth, that dungfly!
God send she blast his sons and empire! Send her
A harlot's fame without a harlot's hire;
Let her be stamped on like a loathèd worm,
Flung out and buried like an evil smell.
This is a father's curse; wear it ye twain:
I laid on ye the purple, now instead
I lay this curse, this fiery shirt of Nessus;
Shake ye like dogs, ye shall not shake it off.
To hell! I have done! Ye get no more from me!

Constantine. Brothers, he hath spat his hate: we gave him leave.
Curses from bad men, blessings from the good,—
Both do we prize: we live to earn them both.
For him—— [*He pauses, looking at Maximian.*

Soldiers. Away with him! To death! To death!

Constantine. Brothers, be yours the sentence. If for death,

Be not too harsh : give him his choice of exit.

Exeunt soldiers, with Maximian.

Enter Fausta. She kneels imploringly.

Fausta. Have mercy !

Constantine. He must die ; it is their sentence ;

But he will choose his death.

Fausta rises with a gesture of despair, and breaks into tears.

Calmly, my wife !

We'll pay in love the choice your love has made :
Wings for you henceforth ! Flutter as you will ;
Gaiety is not least among the virtues.

Fausta. 'Tis very well ! Your heel is on my father ;
Now you are glad ; you give me leave to laugh.

Constantine. What ? Does the rat-trap blame the knife ?

Fausta. My God !
But must he die ?

Constantine. What else ?

Fausta. I hate myself !

Enter soldier with letter. Constantine examines the seal, breaks it, and reads ; then paces the tent, betraying agitation.

Constantine [*to Fausta*]. By your leave.

Exit Fausta in tears.

We'll see him.

Crispus is ushered in. Minervina in disguise waits at the door of the tent.

These from your mother ?

Crispus. Aye, sir.

Constantine. She is dead ?

Crispus. Alas !

Constantine. You know these contents ?
She leaves you as her legacy to us.

Crispus. My lord, she bade me serve you, and she said
The seal would be my passport.

Constantine [*cunningly*]. Where's thy father ?
He must consent to this.

Crispus [*hesitating*]. He died . . . I think so . . .
That is, I did not know him.

Constantine. Not his name ?

Crispus. It is a strangeness, but I know not.

Constantine. What ?
No name ? No image ? Boy, you jest with us !

Crispus. No, sir.

Constantine. A trick then. Next you'll brag of god-birth.
Your father was some roving Zeus, and you
A puppy Perseus, born in showers of gold.

Crispus. Little of that, my lord !

Constantine. A gypsy, then,—
A knave too low for naming.

Crispus [*indignantly*]. Sir ?

Constantine. Explain !
No bridling here. We are to deem this Sphinx,
This riddle of your birth, sat, mocked and hooted
Owl-like on every gate ; and yet, forsooth,
You shot no shaft to bring it down. Explain !

Crispus. So please you, hath not every house its doors
Flung wide and filled with voices,—one alone
Kept shut and passed in silence ?

Constantine. That, or shame.

Crispus [*with increased indignation*]. My lord, she taught me to revere Augustus.

Constantine. So ! And you dare to show him anger, eh ?

Crispus. Yes, if he speak her ill.

Minervina makes a gesture to calm Crispus. It catches the eye of Constantine.

Constantine. Oho! What's there?

Crispus. A slave, my lord: he bears my arms and gear.

Constantine. A sword, a shield, some javelins; therewithal
To war with twenty legions.

Crispus. No, Augustus.

Constantine. It needs they shall, unless betimes you learn
The grovels of the court, and gulp your anger.

Crispus. Pardon! But, Sir, I thought you shamed my mother.

Constantine. And if I did, dare you defy me, youngster?

Crispus. Herclé, my lord, and were you God Himself
I would not suffer evil speech of her.

Constantine. What gods and emperors send you'll suffer, and the more the worse you take it: think on that;
Next time you'll count the peril.

Crispus. I'm thinking, Sir,
There be some things for which we count no peril.

Constantine. Prithee! In reason! Your mother is no more:
We gibe at ghosts: what matter? Fool, they care not.
Yet, at a word, your spleen is up and angry:—
You'd dash your living soul out for the dead:
Is't reason?

Crispus. That I know not. Blood will boil;
Likely by causes deeper than their Reason.

Constantine. Tut! Honour, faith, religion, worn-out tackle.
Hug life; you'll get no other. True, since Rome
Lost faith in ghosts and live ancestral spirits,
Took Reason for her guide, and learned that men,
Being dead, are dead as rats, each rat of them
We emperors have made japes of. Thus: "Ho, Lucius,
Your mother was a harlot!" Then says Lucius:

" If't please you, Augustus, she was so. Indeed,
Now, as I mind me, she was a very bitch:
Your grace is good to say she was a harlot."
These be court manners. You shall learn them soon.
" Give thanks for cuffs, or else you'll suffer cudgels ":
That is their proverb. . . . Pray what office seek you?
Pantler or butler, asiarch or clown?

Crispus. So please you, Sir, I would be of your guard.

Constantine. A post of peril, youngster. This same night,
But for the care of the Empress——

Minervina starts and makes a gesture of despair.

Strike that slave.
He fools us with his antics.—Sirrah, I say,
Last night we had been butchered in our sleep,
But for the Empress. 'Tis a post of peril.
Your mother wished it?

Crispus. Aye, Sir, for she said,
" Would that her bosom were a living buckler
To save from peril him who saves the world ";
And made me vow that I would do the like.

Constantine. She said it? She? Of us?
[*With suppressed emotion.*] Go leave us!

Crispus quits the tent: Constantine withdraws behind the curtain.

Crispus. Have I well spoken?

Minervina. O my son!

Crispus. I loathe him:
Such things he says, I burn with anger!—Yet
When like a great sun rising on the world
He gazes on you——

[*Suddenly.*] Mother! Are you ill?

Minervina. Faint,—just a little. It passes.

Crispus. I'll not leave you.

Minervina. Go, foolish boy; he comes. All's well with me.
Crispus. It is not. You are ill. I will not leave you.
Minervina. Obey me, boy. Your life is yet to live.
Crispus. Yes, and for you.
Minervina. No, Crispus: but for men.
I were a clinging shadow on your path.
Go, and be great. You bear my life in yours;
In you I act; I shall not grieve,—ah, no!
One word! Still trust him. Keep your faiths. God sends them.
We'll go out steadfast, dreaming as we came.
Crispus. The tears are in your eyes; I cannot leave you!
Minervina. Go!
Crispus. Why solve their tangles, we whose skein is clear?
Minervina. Too late, my son: our flax is on their wheel.
Behold!

Re-enter Constantine. He beckons Crispus into the tent.

Constantine. I have inquired within, and learned
Somewhat about your mother, and—your father.
Heigh-ho, young Sir! Snaffle your wrath! I swear
Your father was a scoundrel.
Crispus. Say not that!
You are Augustus, but——
Constantine. Rebel, what now?
I say he was a scoundrel, and your mother——
Crispus. Herclé! No word against my mother!

Handles his sword. Minervina flings herself between them. Constantine thrusts her aside contemptuously. She falls.

Constantine. Guards, there!

Enter guards instantly.

Disarm, but hurt no hair of him. One moment!

Crispus is seized and surrounded and stripped of his arms. Constantine meanwhile has withdrawn behind the curtain. Song without.

Enter soldiers, singing.

Soldiers. Yo ! yo ! Hólaboló
Across the world we swagger,
And grip the throat
Of Goth, and gloat
To see the Scythian stagger.

1st Soldier. Thor ! did ye see him ?
2nd Soldier. Yea, by Pol ! The pigeon
Would barely bulge a codpiece.
3rd Soldier. S'elp me, gods !
I've seen 'em sprawl their inwards, spiked their gills,
Scooped out the porridge from their lousy pates,
Drunk toss-pots from their brain-pans, but by Consus !
This beggars wars and tumults.

Sings :

Yo ! yo ! Hólaboló !
From dyke and bog and seasand
Stark red and rank
We plucked the Frank,
And jagged him in the weasand.

2nd Soldier. Muzzle thy jaw !
Yoho ! The Emperor's tent.
1st Soldier. A tent ? A rat-trap :
The Emperor's skinned his rat, and gone away.
3rd Soldier. No, s'elp me gods, the guard's within.
1st Soldier. What there ? More vermin, eh ?
2nd Soldier. Yoho ! Lay hold o' his lugs :
We'll baste him soundly.

Re-enter Augustus, bearing a cloak, edged with purple, and a sword.

Constantine [*To the drunken soldiers*]. Away !

They go out.

[*To the guards.*] Release him. Go !

[*To Crispus.*] You, Sir, remain.

Crispus, released, remains alone with Constantine. Minervina lies between them. Crispus kneels beside her. Constantine seats himself and writes.

Crispus [*with agitation*]. Where are you hurt ? Oh, speak !

He rushes for water from the well, kneels and sprinkles her face. Constantine rises, holding a script.

Constantine. A swoon,—no more.

Rise, boy. . . . [*Calling to the guard*] A surgeon there !

[*To Crispus.*] We did but try you,—

Plied the rough strigil,—found your fibres stout :

Henceforth we trust you.

Crispus [*ignoring him, raises Minervina, so that her face is to the breeze without the tent ; he fans her eagerly*]. So ! Ah, speak one word !

I will not leave you,—I will not ! Never ! Never !

Constantine. My surgeon will attend him.

Crispus [*with agony*]. Look not so !

Constantine. Up, boy ! Our time is short : your slave can wait.

Crispus [*looks up and reiterates the word mechanically*]. " Wait ? "

[*Passionately.*] Oh, those eyes ! Those glazed and vacant windows !

All, all the comfort is gone out of them.

Constantine [*laying the coat on his shoulders*]. Come, wear this cloak and sword. You are ennobled.
Here is your patent of nobility:
Henceforth Augustus is your friend.
Crispus [*still ignoring him*]. My God!
Not death! It cannot be!
Constantine [*with irritation*]. A swoon, I say:
He came between us, and we thrust him down.
Have I not said my surgeon shall attend him?
But you,—you may be Cæsar one day.
Crispus. Hush!
A heart may beat no louder than a bird's,
Yet there is life.
Constantine. You hear us, boy?
Crispus [*with agony*]. No breath!
Constantine. I say—you may be Cæsar——
Crispus [*leaping to his feet and facing Constantine fiercely*]. Give her life:
You took it from her. Give it back, I say!
Constantine. You set great store by this your underling.
Crispus [*flinging the coat at Constantine's feet*]. My curses on you! What is this coat to me?
She is dead!
Constantine. Young man, you know not whom you curse.
Crispus. A king o' the world; what care I for a king?
The world itself is broken at my feet!
Mother! O mother!
Constantine [*in a changed tone*]. What is this?

Constantine looks on the face of Minervina, and recognises her. Enter a Physician.

Physician. My lord?
Constantine. Restore that woman: I command you!

The Physician kneels and examines her.

Physician [*rising*]. Most high and mighty Emperor, she is dead.

Will you that I remove her ?

Constantine. Go !

Exit Physician. A pause.

My son !

Crispus. I would as lief call you my father as——

O hell ! O Furies !

Constantine. On me the Furies ! Boy,

I *am* your father.

Crispus [*amazed*]. You ?

Struck with a wild and sudden thought, he seizes Constantine, and drags him to Minervina's body.

Kneel ! Touch her ! Lay

Your hands upon her. . . So ! . . . Even as a god

She worshipped you : still, still your touch may save her.

Constantine. The victim is divine, the god is dust.

I wear no wreath that I should touch this altar.

Crispus. Kneel ! Kneel, I say !

Constantine [*kneels, takes her face between his hands and kisses her on the brow. He rises, throws his hands out and speaks with emotion as if to himself*]. She moves not. It is vain.

These hands grasp earth and empire, but her spirit

Never ! A voice, a song, a vision, so

It flies, it vanishes, and leaves alone

A wonder in the air, a sacred silence.

Now, O my son, now all the realms these hands

Clutched when they wrung her life out,—they are nought !

Dank heavy sod to toss upon her bier !

Crispus. Surely her lips moved ! Surely then her eyes—

O God !

Constantine. They move not! She is dead. Now close them.

They would but see a face that's shaped for fame,
Stone that was once a statue in her sight.
My power is bankrupt. If I lay on her
This purple [*indicating his own imperial robes*] lo, the cere-cloth mocks the saint.
Or if to atone,—command me, O my son!—
I publish her with pompous obsequies,
Her dirge denounces him she honoured most.
She has come home to show me my past life,
True glory and the false,—her trust, my treason.
Fate runs me to my goal: in every eye
That scorned her loneliness, I, absent, smote her.
Now have these blind hands struck her to the ground,
Nor even in death my power can lift her up.
[*Calling.*] Lactantius there!
What think you, O my son!
How shall we bury her? Command me, boy.

Crispus. With me! With me! O let me die with her!

Constantine. No; but to you we compensate her wrong.

Secret she lived and silently she died:
Here will we bury her, and fold our tents;
Leave her companioned with the oaks and pines;
Then secretly and silently night falls,
And stars shine out, and gaze upon her grave,
And windflowers blow, and dream and wave and wonder,
White as the vision of her soul in ours.

Enter Lactantius.

Behold, Lactantius, Minervina's son,
He is your charge: teach him your Christian faith;
We own him, but as yet to you alone:

Utter it not unbid ;—nor you, my son :
Rank without power is peril. Say, Lactantius :
How many favourites have our favours slain,
We emperors ? Say, Lactantius.
Lactantius. O Augustus,
Give me to fill my pen a lake of blood,
Therewith I'll write three hundred years of Rome.
Constantine. Moreover, we owe the Empress gratitude ;
Maxentius lives,—her brother : he has power.
Hardly this moment when she saves our life
Shall we upraise a rival to her child.
Yet fear not : we are just ; we live for justice.
[*Laying his hand on Crispus' shoulder.*] In you we would atone
all wrongs to her.
Boy, we are proud. A small thing and a merry
When last we looked upon you,—good times, those !—
Now are you great of limb : be great in action.
Come not anigh the Empress or her kin,
Lest they should plot your death ; but from this day
Keep counsel with your soul, and dwell in camps ;
Deliberately swift and sternly mild,
Outmarch the winds and sweep the continents
With scythe and sickle of relentless war ;
Faithful to those who keep their faith with you,
Your friends shall be your fortress ; until then
Two friends are yours : a brave heart and Augustus.
Here is our hand.
He offers it ; but Crispus stands with arms drooped and averted head.
Constantine. What, no ?
Crispus. It slew my mother !
Constantine. Unwitting, urged by Fate. But for her guise
This had not been.

Crispus. You drove her to disguise.

Constantine. True! True! She could not beg of Constantine . . .

Nor he of Crispus. Mark you, boy, I say,
Nor he of Crispus. Choose, then. Are we foes?
Here by her graveside?

Crispus [*as if with a struggle*]. No!

Constantine. Your hand. [*Offering his. Crispus takes it, but with averted head.*

Guards! [*Guards enter the tent.*

Carry her within.

[*To Crispus.*] And if in days to come
Her name is spoken, we robe our souls in white
As to the gods who shine above us changeless.

Crispus passes behind the curtain with the body of Minervina. Lactantius remains.

Lactantius, as I think, your god is right,
The kingdom that's within,—that is the best:
No double life, no trampling on the true.
We will compel all peoples to believe;
Snatch down the temples of the gods of Rome,
And use their coffers for the cross of Christ,
Our sign, our trophy!

Lactantius. Hardly, O Constantine,—
Hardly you rear Christ's kingdom on that grave,
Or conjure heaven with brandishing of swords.

Constantine. What? What? We bring your party into power.

As for that grave, to him we make amends;
It were not politic to publish her.
Besides, we would consider this at leisure.
What more,—eh, fellow?

Lactantius. It is much, my lord.

Constantine. One moment! Watch that lad. You marked his manner?
The drooping head, the hand that clutched that rail,
Eyes that he gave not unto mine?
Lactantius. Ah, true!
Constantine. I asked him to command me, and confessed
The wrong I did his mother; yet withal
He gave his hand, his heart he hath not given.
Lactantius. His heart was very heavy, O Augustus!
Constantine. Belike! Belike! Yet must we have him watched:
There is the seed of vengeance in these doings.
Go and do well by him, as we do justly,
And in all love, yet heedful.
Lactantius. Good, my lord.

CHORUS

Heard between the Acts.

Ai ! Ai !
Anguish eterne !
Cometh and goeth
Queen Proserpine !
Poppies and pomegranates blowing shall cling to her ;
Zephyrs shall sigh to her, nightingales sing to her :
Us in the underworld never a ray
Lights, nor the fluting of birds ; but the day
Thou comest, thou Coré, thou Queen Proserpine,
There floats in the gloom of our sunless recesses
A fragrance of flowers, and thy chapleted tresses
Rain light, and we reach in the ebb of the stream
Lean hands and wan faces, and lapt in a dream
O loves of our days on the earth, ye return !
Ai ! Ai !
Anguish eterne !
Unmated, unsated,
We reach and we yearn
For the light and the love, the roses and wine,
And the Wonder and Music of Earth, O divine,
O child of Demeter, O Queen Proserpine !

The song passes into a wail, during which the curtain rises.

ACT III

SCENE I.—*The grove of a temple of Cybelé and Demeter on a cliff by the Aegean Sea.*

Enter Rustics.

1st Rustic. What sound is that?
2nd Rustic. It came from yonder temple.
Strange things and awesome bide within that fane;
Lo through a crystal, Pluto throned, and Styx
And Persephatta—shadows of the dead,
And demons dancing, but no clogs a-clatter.
'Twas there the goddess rose up from the earth.
3rd Rustic. Afore she rose they heard the likes of this;
And thunder, and grinding rocks, and gurgling water.
2nd Rustic. Awhile ago a great lady passed the town.
She's gone up to the villa with her rotinue.
1st Rustic. What's "roṭ-in-you"?
2nd Rustic. Baggage o' great folk, ye fool.
Never ye saw such pomp; and men-at-arms
An hundred.
1st Rustic. That'll be a great show, fellow.
2nd Rustic. Aye: we'll have emperors meeting here, they say.
3rd Rustic. Likewise there's doings yonder by the strait:
Out by the foreland fisher-lads at dawn
Saw corpses floating; and a mighty flock

Of carrion fowl sailed up against the blast,
Shrieking.

2nd Rustic. And down the Great Road yestereve
A troop of horse ran riderless. Some fell,
Some drew up panting, sniffed the gale, crashed on,
And vanished in the night.

3rd Rustic. Great battles, likely. . . .
There it go again. I'm off to fetch the townsfolk.
Likely the goddess rises from the ground.

Exeunt. Enter the Empress Fausta and Crispus. They seat themselves on a rock facing the sea. Crispus is several years older than in the last act, and dressed as a præfect or captain of the fleet.

Crispus. Then, madam, 'twas as though the sky took thought
And knew the world's fate hung upon a breeze:
Like wraiths of ruined gods the fog stole off;
And lo their fleet, a city on the waves,
High towered and paved with streets of shining oars.
God in the gale said, "Conquer!" and His light
Let flash a challenge in their blinded front.
Our keels 'gan singing; sudden a thousand throats
Roared with the lust of battle, and our force
Bore slowly down upon them. Hidden rams
Ripped them, hooks grappled, engines swept their decks.
Sheep of the waves and huddled without pen,
Fireships we drave among them; panic spread,
Flesh writhed and weltered; night alone had mercy.
Steel-eyed and soaked in blood and brine and hatred,
Our men ceased slaughter counting of their keels
Three hundred sunk or captured with their crews.

Fausta. Three hundred, and your fleet was less than two!

Crispus. God's nostrils blew a flame in every soul,

And from the heavens a wind to fill our sails.
They say that on the foremost ship——
Fausta. Ah, whose?
Crispus. The Admiral's, madam.
Fausta. The Cæsar Crispus'?
Crispus. They say Christ stood upon the poop, his hand
Beckoning, a halo round him——
Fausta. O, you thrill me!
Did they not take the Cæsar for the Christ?
Crispus. I know not. This I know; Licinius
Is crushed. Five emperors ruled the world; but now
From Nile to Severn, Calpé to Caucasus,
Constantine rules alone. The world is Christ's.[7]
Fausta. True; and the Cæsar did it.
Crispus. No, not he.
Constantine, if you will: yet no; a dream
Dreamt by a Peasant.
Fausta. A peasant?
Crispus. . . . Then the deep
Shook with the thunder of a mighty psalm:
"The Lord is a great God, a King above
All gods. The sea is His; He made it, and
The land. Come, let us worship and bow down!"
Fausta. The sea, yes, it is His! I love the sea!
Is not its voice a battle-song, its breeze
A strong man's arms flung round in wild caress?
Nay, think you not this victory by sea
Was more than Constantine's?
Crispus. Herclé! Why, no!
Constantine's, madam, was ten times as great.
Fausta. Oh, do you think so? [*Aside.*] And what if this
were he? . . .
Captain, but do you know the word they say?

Crispus. What, of the Cæsar ?

Fausta. " Saul hath slain his thousands,
David his tens of thousands."

Crispus. They lie, then, madam.

Fausta. My lord is very angry.

Crispus. Well he may be.

Fausta. And jealous, Captain,—jealous of the Cæsar.
Sure for they say your Crispus conquers all,—
Rough hearts, rough winds, rough waters.

Crispus. He does his best.

Fausta. You are too cold. I shall be thinking. . . . You,
You are his chiefest captain, did you say ?

Crispus. Yes, madam.

Fausta [*aside*]. It is Cæsar's self : I swear it.
[*To Crispus.*] You are too cold ; you sting me to defend him.
O yes, we all know Constantine is great,
But at your Cæsar's age he did no deed like this.

Crispus. You say so,—you ?

Fausta. Indeed, why should I not ?
When will you men conceive us ? Think you, sir,
We may be scanned by rules like little verses ?
I have not seen your Crispus. They were fearful
Lest having babes myself,—the silly hen,—
I should go peck him ! Pooh !

Crispus. But so it might be.

Fausta. More likely they. You know not how they talk.

Crispus. Who, madam ?

Fausta. Athanasius and his party.

Crispus. Augustus harks to them ?

Fausta. Yes, and grows pale,
And very silent. What he thinks I know not.
Pray, sir, and are you homoousian ?

Crispus. Empress, a soldier recks not of those quibbles.

Fausta. Quibbles? Oh, me! What would they say to hear you?
You were not at Nicæa?
Crispus. No, not I.
Fausta. They talked, they wrangled, till they made a creed;
Strutted a lane of spears like little gods,
Then sat and dined, and said it was Christ's kingdom.
Wailing without.
Hark! What is that? The oaphs are in the grove!
There's some one dead! I shudder!
Crispus. Fear not, madam.
Fausta [*after a pause*]. All's still! . . . The sun,—the silken sea! I love it!
Leagues, leagues of laughing blue! I'll wear a dress
Woven of silk like that,—all flashing silver:
Wear it to meet lord Crispus: do you hear me?
Blue like the waves he conquered. Then he'll know
Fausta is not the envious hag they paint her.
Crispus. That, madam, I can tell him.
Fausta. Would you, Captain?
Look on me! Say! Have we not met before?
Crispus [*after a pause*]. I think so . . . yes . . . Diana's wood.
Fausta. But then
You did not know me.
Crispus. True.
Fausta. Four years ago.
There was a grave; you were half crazed; you tore
The turf up with your hands. You frightened me:
I watched you through the trees; you looked so sad.
Then I took courage. . . . Captain, you remember?
Crispus. I had lost a mother, Empress.
Fausta. And I a father.

My husband caused his death. Also from him
My husband had the empire. I wonder, Captain,
How did your mother die that she was buried
So strangely in that wood?

Crispus. I would forget.

Fausta. The song again: hark! hark!

Choir from beneath:

O Goddess, thy wheat and thy calamint we,
Blown out upon rocks by a foam-lashed sea:
No ray, no rain on the bronzèd husk,
No tears dropped down from the stars in the dusk;
Nor know we the bliss of the rose and her bees,
Of Iris that suns great wings in the breeze,
Or fronds of the ferns far stretched from a cave,
Or Lotus asleep on the lap of the wave;
Ah, fain to unfurl
We shrink and we curl;
Forced back to the sod in sorrow we burn:
Ai! Ai!
Anguish eterne!
From prison unrisen
We reach and we yearn
For the light and the shadow, the dew and the shine
And the Wonder and Music of Earth, O divine,
O bliss of the dead, O Queen Proserpine!

Fausta. Oh, did you hear?
A song of spirits yearning in the dark,—
Of lives unrealised; my life, it seemed!
Captain, have *you* felt that?

Crispus. All feel it, Herclé!
None gains his dreams. As soon swim galaxies,
Drop anchor in the blue, and board the stars.

Fausta. Oh, but that wonder and music of the earth,—
Have you not felt it,—longed to feel again?

Crispus. Perhaps.

Fausta. Once more than ever?

Crispus. Maybe,—yes.

Fausta [*tenderly*]. Diana's wood?

Crispus. I pray you, Empress, pardon.
So then you say that Constantine is due
Here at the kalends, three days hence. Meanwhile
We disembark our force to join with his. [*Exit.*

Fausta. Stay! . . .
[*Alone.*] He is gone! A very god! They said,—
Now let me think,—tall, and that scar,—abrupt,—
At times when moved strange music fills his voice.
Yes, it is he!

Enter Perdix and Pantolabus. They are dressed in white, as priests, and tonsured. From the opposite side enter Fausta's attendants.

Perdix [*bowing*]. Most fair and noble lady,
A humble priest, poor slave of Dindymene:
May it please you, but these songs are strange.
We heard them at this season two years gone;
Much moanings also; and a maiden pure
Gazed in a crystal, where the altar stands,
Clean through to Hades: gods! an awful sight!
Earth yawned, smoke issued, and a shape arose:
Isis we think, or likelier Proserpine,
Called by Demeter at the first of Spring:
May Jove forbid, no treason to the empire!
Coré is queen of heaven and hell, Christ's mother;
And Christ a god among us. Popa, say:
Is not the Christ a god?

Pantolabus. For sure he is.

Perdix. Also we slew a sow to Proserpine,
And from the snout a little devil leapt
Squeaking " Aigh ! Aigh ! Don't whip me, Constantine ! "
Thus were the Thracian victories foretold.
Will it please your honours to attend to-night
Our sacred mysteries ?

Fausta. What say you, girls ?
Should my lord hear,—but no, he'll not arrive
For three days yet. . . . Maybe,—yes,—we will come.

Perdix. Great Goddess, be propitious !—Fare you well.

Exeunt Perdix and Pantolabus.

Fausta. Euphrosyne, dear, you saw the captain pass ?

Euphrosyne. Yes, madam.

Fausta. Tell me : How did he look ? Not angered ?

Euphrosyne. Why, surely no ! Was not Augusta gracious ?

Fausta. Ah, so, so ! . . . Nor moved a little ? . . .

Euphrosyne. Twice he paused ;
Turned, walked a space, then paused again as one
Who pondered deeply.

Fausta. Looking back at me ?

Euphrosyne. Yes, once.

Fausta. Euphrosyne !

Euphrosyne. Yes, madam ?

Fausta. Say,
Do I look aged ?

Euphrosyne. As young as Hebe, madam.

Fausta. Bah ! Who would be an Empress ? Not to trust
A word, nor even an eye that flatters you.
I would give empire only once to know
One creature loved and would risk life for me.

SCENE II.[8]—*Interior of the Temple of Cybelé and Demeter. Moonlight. A high altar festooned with wheat and myrtle at the rear; a fire thereon; behind it a statue of the goddess; flat baskets containing offerings on the steps leading up to the door of the adytum or sanctuary behind the statue. A low marble couch with clawed feet, and beside it on a small pillar a crystal with a lamp behind burning dimly. This lamp supplies the only light beside that of the moon. Perdix as priest, and Pantolabus as popa, or priest's minister, robed in white, stand beside the altar. Fausta is seated observing the ceremony; with her Euphrosyne, the child Lalage and other attendants. The faces of all the spectators are veiled.*

Lalage [*whispering to Fausta*]. Please may I bear the basket?
Perdix [*drawing on the ground a circle*]. Let her bear it.
Pantolabus [*loudly*].
Hush every tongue. Let none pare nails nor spit,
Nor pull his locks. All infidels be absent,
Absent all mockers of these mysteries,
Jews, Epicures and foes of great Augustus.
He retires and returns bearing offerings.
Perdix [*taking the offerings severally from Pantolabus and Lalage, and intoning the prayer*].
Mother Demeter, unto thee this sow,
Bruised herbs and halms of rye and honey cakes,
This thievish vixen fox,—the offering due.
Grant, for thou canst, peace after wars and tumults,
The youngling corn untrampled, green with showers,
Capella's gift and thine,—in all Earth's womb
Seeds trembling into life, love's nourishers.
Grant furthermore, great Goddess, to this lady,

Nigh to thine altar now, though not initiate,
Some sign, some wonder! By thy torch and basket!

Pantolabus. By Cronos and Iäsius!

Perdix. By thy child
Persephone!

Pantolabus. By all thy griefs and travels!

Perdix. And by all names whereby all peoples know thee!

Pantolabus. Cybelé, Isis, Rhea, Dindymene!

Perdix. Hecaté, Bendis, Paphian Aphrodite,
Thou who art all that hath been, all that is,
Whose veil no mortal lifteth: grant, we pray thee,—
Grant her some sign, some wonder, that the world
May know thou livest, and the beauteous gods,
Strong to bestow on all who worship thee
Life everlasting!

Perdix moves toward the crystal and watches it intently in silence; suddenly the lamp grows brighter and the crystal is seen to sparkle.

Perdix [*with excitement*]. Great Demeter, hail!
A sign! An omen! The crystal calls and flashes.
Is there a maiden in your midst, pure, simple,
Meet for the Goddess who bestows all gifts?
She shall see visions, and be clothed with charms.

The Empress makes a sign to Euphrosyne; she gesticulates reluctance.

Pantolabus [*loudly*]. Come forth, O virgin!

Euphrosyne is led bashfully to the couch.

Perdix. Lie thou here! Gaze, dear one,—
Dear to the gods,—with all thy maiden might;
Peer in the crystal; banish thought; gaze deep.

Euphrosyne [*shyly*]. So?

Perdix. Even so. What seest thou?

Euphrosyne. Nothing.

Perdix [*making passes with his hands*]. Now ?
Euphrosyne. Still nothing. . . . Oh, the light ! I fall aweary !
She closes her eyes ; he draws back the eyelids.
Perdix. What now ?
Euphrosyne. The crystal flows.
Perdix. Milk of the gods ! . . .
Let all be silent till the maiden speak.

A pause. Then in a terrible voice :

Come, Mormo, Gorgo, Lamia, Saint of Streets,
Hecaté, thou who wanderest in the gloom,
In blood delighting, and the baying hounds,
And bones and barrows of the dead——
Euphrosyne [*shrieking*]. Oh ! oh !
Perdix [*starts back suddenly raising his hands*].
Hell's gates are open ! Speak ! What seest thou now ?
Euphrosyne. Shadow, and crashing rocks and dancing flame.
Perdix. Pass through the walls and enter.
Euphrosyne [*piteously*]. How can I ? Look !
The hag ! The whip ! The blood !
[*He looks at her sternly, she shrinks back submissive.*] I will go through.
Perdix. Spare her, Tisiphoné ! She is not thine.
Lash thou thy dead that gape on heaven in vain,—
A callow brood whose nest is thatched with fire.
Euphrosyne [*laughing hysterically*]. Ha, little devils, don't gape so ! Chuck, chuck, chuck, besom !
Perdix. Besom ? What, a broomstick ?
Euphrosyne [*wildly*]. To sweep all hell with !
Hul-lul-lul-lul ! Carna ! Bronté ! Bruches !
Fausta. She has gone mad ! Euphrosyne, my dear,
What are you saying ?

Euphrosyne looks at Fausta wildly, like a frightened animal, then submissively at Perdix as if waiting his command.

Perdix. Hold, Beelzebub !

Thunder. Fausta gives a cry of terror.

Jove speaks ; but fear not. Nought can pass this circle ;
Not Dis himself. . . . Enough ! The truth is clear ;
Hell is perturbed ; Spring even there is busy ;
Sad sunless halls unwashed by any breeze,
They know the change ; the Phantoms, roused from sleep,
Rise in great hosts, swept onward by the car
Of Proserpine. She, circled with a choir,
Ghostly but fair, cries " Valé ! " to her spouse,
And earthward lifts her head.

Euphrosyne, who has sat shaken with sobs during this recital, brightens as his voice changes, and becomes eager and cheerful.

Now tell thy vision :
Looms the glad choir, the rose-crowned car, in sight ?
Dear to the gods, what seest thou ?

Euphrosyne. Myriad shapes,
Bound with white fillets, bearing silver lyres.
Their lips are parted as in song, but mute ;
One crowned with roses, fairer than the rest,
Seems borne up in their midst.

Perdix [*excitedly*]. Hail, Proserpine !
Breathe, Berecynthian flute, thine advent song !

Song from beneath ; during which Pantolabus leads Euphrosyne back. She walks unsteadily as if in a trance. Perdix meanwhile stands tragically, hand to ear, as if to catch every syllable :

Hark ! Rise !
Queen of Aidoneus !
Lit are thy corridors,
Shaken with melody ;
Shot-through with shuttles, bird-like, angelical,
Breathers of life in the dark and chimerical
Dungeons of death. Swift weavers, they sing,
Clothing the plasm,—enwrap and enring
Thee soaring, thee deathless, O Queen Proserpine !
Trancèd they sing in choric antiphoné,
Star-like they hover, a Magian epiphany,
Shine for a sign of new blossoms, new fashions
Of life, and the strife of great sinews and passions :
Dark save thou hark to us, queen of Aidoneus,
Hark ! Rise !
List to our litany ;
Vagrant and fragrant
Fumes of fresh dittany
Bring we, and cling to thy robes as they shine
With the Wonder and Music of Earth, O divine !
O child of Demeter, O Queen Proserpine !

Perdix [*with benedictory arms outstretched*].
Blest beyond mortals, thou shalt see the goddess !

A pause. The temple is suddenly filled with strong incense. Scenting this, rapturously :

Fragrance how sweet, as of a thousand fields,—
Myrtle and hyacinth, amaranth, melilot !
I feel, I breathe the goddess ! All keep silence.

Thunder is again heard.

Earth cracks, Jove thunders ! Proserpine, arise !

Song : during which Theona as Proserpine is seen slowly rising from the ground dressed

in a saffron robe. A rosy haze surrounds her; on her head sits a star; she is garlanded with roses: petals of poppies and pomegranates fall from her robe; she soars through the air, and with the closing of the song passes above the temple.

There is no death, though in silence he slumbers,
The strong man, the brave; but in rhythm life's numbers
Still beat, and her feet through eternity range,
And the fingers of God touch all things to change.—
O wings as of thistles! O purple not shed
Save for sleep, though thou weep and sob down to thy bed,
Unfurled in fresh worlds thy scroll shall unroll:
Death reaps but the deep is a well-spring of soul,
Exhaustless! So thou
Sleep freshened, thy brow
New wreathéd with roses, O queen of Aidoneus!
Mount! Rise!
Loose, Erichthonius,
Thy gale-gotten coursers,
Thy Zephyrs harmonious!
Now soar thee, O Coré, a wonder and sign
Of the destiny deathless, the glory divine,
Of us thy beloved, O Queen Proserpine.

As the apparition passes above the architraves of the temple, a murmur of amazement is heard from without. It grows gradually louder and then dies away.

Perdix [*seizing the lamp and a scroll and pen, and offering it to Fausta*]. Quick! In the wake of the goddess, while the smoke
Ascends to heaven, write down thy dearest wish,

Thy bosom's love, the secret of thy heart,
Unuttered yet to husband, friend, or child :
That love, that wish, the goddess may fulfil.
Write, but in water, so that none may read,—
None save the goddess.

Fausta. [*takes the pen and is about to write*]. So ?
[*Hesitating.*] It is not safe.

Perdix. What, water ? See, I'll write. Now who can read this ?

He writes and shows it to her, then turns the scroll.

Nay, you may wipe it with this cloth ; but first
Show it to the goddess ; hold it up before her ;
Then come to-morrow to the temple : if
She deigns reply her message will be found
Sealed on her lap and you alone may read.

Fausta [*writing*]. What, so ?

Perdix. Yes. Plainly. Lay it on her lap,—
One minute only. . . . Good ! Here is the napkin.

Fausta dabs the writing over.

The scroll is sacred ; leave it with the goddess.

Fausta obeys.

Return, and may the goddess prosper thee.

Exeunt Fausta and attendants. Perdix and Pantolabus remain.

Perdix. Go lock the door.
Pantolabus. 'Tis done.
Perdix. No one peers in ?
Pantolabus. No one.
Perdix [*holding the scroll to the fire*]. The acid bites ; the writing comes out clear.

[*He reads slowly and with amazement.*]

" Dear Goddess,—I love the Cæsar Crispus. Give me one

hour with him alone and I will worship thee for ever.—
FAUSTA AUGUSTA."

Pantolabus. Empress of Earth, and we have stripped her bare !
The very tunic of her soul is off.

Perdix. Naked to the incestuous bosom ! Nay, by Pol,
We sit inside her heart ! We have a whisper
That, breathed, would shudder to the Scythian marge.

Pantolabus. It is a secret worth ten thousand talents.

Loud knocking without. Pantolabus drops the scroll close by the altar.

Infernal powers ! The Christian dogs are at us.

Perdix goes to the door and peers through an eyehole.

Perdix. A knight,—he that was with her in the grove.
We must admit him. Seal the trap-door first.

Pantolabus obeys. Perdix then unlocks the door.

Enter Crispus with an officer armed.

Crispus. Who engineers this pageant ?

Perdix [*thrusting out his arms tragically*].
Infidels, avaunt !

Officer. Cæsar, shall I strike him ?

Crispus waves his hand in deprecation.

Perdix [*falling on his knees and acting the rôle of a rustic priest*].
Great Demeter !
That he should deign ! The goddess and the Cæsar,
Both in one day !

Crispus. The goddess. Ah !

Perdix [*feigning breathlessness*]. And did not . . .
Cæsar behold her ? Wonderful ! Just so . . .
It happened . . . two years past . . . I cannot speak :
It takes my breath away.

Crispus. No need, my man,
We'll have your ropes, not reasons.

Perdix [*looking blankly at Pantolabus*]. Ropes? Our ropes?
Ah, popa, them we drew the sow with. Pray you,
His honour wants the sow ropes.
Officer. Fool! Not that,—
Cranks, pulleys—where are they fixed?
Perdix. Come, see!
Here are no ropes. I know not what you mean.
Crispus. The cliff,—I will be sworn she vanished there.
Perdix. The goddess? Did she? No: for we saw a light,—
The wondrous star that sat upon her brow;
It went up to the heavens.
Crispus [*to officer*]. No yokel cunning;
They play it well. . . . It was a fire balloon
Loosed in mid-air; what think you?
Officer. That would do it.
Perdix. Eh, eh, your worship? We do not understand.
Poor priests are we,—poor slaves of Dindymene.
Crispus [*to officer*]. Herclé, these Greeklings, so like truth they lie,
The shift makes truth ashamed, doubting itself.
This is the man, be sure. There's craft in his eye.
Officer. I think so, Sir.
Crispus. Come! Call your goddess back.
Let me have speech with her. If she acquits you
The rest is pardoned.
Perdix. Holy Proserpine!
What trouble hast thou brought us!
Crispus. "Proserpine?"
So that's the tale.
Perdix. Yes, if it please you, Cæsar.
These three years she hath risen,—just so,—from Hades.
We make no doubt it is the queen of Hades.
We were at worship, seeking for a sign,—

The gracious lady,—she was here ; she'll tell you,—
We were at worship and the goddess rose,—
Did she not, popa ?
Pantolabus. All the priest says is true.
Crispus. Goddess or no, go call her.
Perdix. Pardon, lord ;
What Cæsar cannot do, shall then this slave ?
Crispus. Truly he cannot call the gods from heaven,
But send the rogues to hell he can, and will.
Perdix. What shall I say ? O goddess, save us ! Sir,
We'll offer prayer ; by day and night we'll pray ;
Maybe she'll come again ; then you shall see
We are true men, poor slaves of Dindymene.
But look you,—and if she will not,—oh ! oh ! oh !
It may not please her to come back again !
Crispus. Ah, so ! She may not know me. She may fear.
Tell her one word :—" Diana's wood." She'll know.
Perdix [*aside*]. " Diana's wood " : I see it ! So she flouts me.
I know a thing about Diana's wood.
He shall not have her ; no, by Zeus he shall not !
[*To Crispus.*] I'm thinking. . . . " Diana's wood." . . . It cannot be
Cæsar has met the goddess ; yet is he
Noble beyond man. With such the gods have talked.
Crispus. Cease prating. Call her.
Perdix. Might it be she plucked
Flowers ? For they say the goddess goes a-gathering
Whenever she walks the earth.
Crispus. Flowers,—that is true.
And was it after all no slave ?
Perdix. Great Mother !
Hearken ! He says a slave ! It was thy Daughter !
Apollo, Hercules, nay thou thyself,

Demeter,—and did ye not mask as slaves ?

Crispus. Impossible ! And yet she seemed no mortal.
Have I then dreamt, and doted on my dream ?

Perdix. Great fortune falls on those the gods have favoured.

Crispus [*to himself*]. So ! It was so ! She was more fair than mortals. . . .
Come, we will know the truth. Praefect, these priests,—
Seize, strip them, have them flogged.

Perdix. Spare, O Cæsar !
Charms have I,—potent spells ; they'll call the stars down,—
Why not the very gods ? Owls' feathers, moon-foam,
Cypress, wild figs, eggs smeared with blood of toads,
Bones plucked at dead of night from bad men's tombs.
All, I will use them all,—I vow it ! Spare us !
Give us till dawn ; the spell will work no sooner :
And if we fail, destroy us.

Crispus. So ! Till dawn.
And if a hair of her is harmed, you pay.

Exeunt Crispus and officer.

Perdix. To hell with him ! I'll never let her go.
The fruit is ripe : it drops into my hands ;
And now this damned Cæsar strips the branch.
He shall not, by the gods ! To hell with him !
Give me another scroll. . . . Now to the adyt,
And fetch me her robe : the old one.

Pantolabus. Let her go.
This passion will undo us. Keep thy winnings.
The game is played ; the Christ has conquered, Perdix.
Turn Christian, burn thy resurrection tackle ;
Be wise and thou shalt be a bishop yet.

Perdix. Bring me the robe, I say.

Pantolabus. He'll fall to kiss it !
He is bewitched !

Perdix [*writes, speaking aloud*].

DEMETER UNTO FAUSTA, EMPRESS:

Thy prayer is heard. Put on this robe. Then kneel at cockcrow in my temple, veiled as before me. Vale.

Re-enter Pantolabus with robe. Perdix lays it on the knees of Demeter, with the scroll.

Go seek the Cæsar; say at cockcrow he
Shall find the thing he seeks,—here in the temple.

Pantolabus. Most prudent! So we yield!

Perdix. Yes: for his neck
The rope he asked. So Perdix pays the Cæsar.

ACT IV

SCENE.[9]—*The same. Before dawn: the temple is in almost total darkness. Fausta, clad in a saffron robe, like that worn by Theona, closely veiled, kneels at the altar. Enter Crispus. She starts; rises and stands breathless, awaiting him on the steps from the adytum.*

Crispus. Theona, do you know me?

Fausta [*softly and tenderly*]. Crispus!

Crispus. I have found you!
Chased, like a lost delicious thought, so long,
Found fair beyond all dreaming.

Fausta. Am I, Crispus?

Crispus. The spirit incarnate of the woods and waves.
Why should great beauty make us tremble? So
When the harp calls the crystal goblet quivers.
Last night your loveliness swept through me, like
Sweet gales among the alders. God, I think,
Lay brooding on the deeps of Time, and sang
His soul into your face. . . . I ask no questions:
The pageant is atoned: it gives me you.

Fausta [*very softly*]. It passed the time: I thought to see you there.

Crispus. Then you are mine! I seize, I clasp, I hoard you.
Nay, but not yet; not till my story's told;

All you have been to me,—the memory merely,
My sacred ilex scattering dews and dreams.
As April falls full-freighted on the trees
The tale of winter told, so to my arms :
But not till then, beloved !

Fausta [*still very softly*]. Ah, speak on !

Crispus. Diana's wood,—all's not forgotten ?

Fausta. Nothing !

Crispus. 'Twas there God took me up, tore out my heart,
Gave me a new one, laid my hand upon
The sword-hilt of the empire,—showed me you,
The fairest thing on earth, bound neck and feet
Unto the foulest——

Fausta. How I loathe him, yes !
Talk on ! It seems like music in the darkness !

Crispus. Your face was music, snatching from the heavens
God's secret. I have travelled on that song ;
Made prince for this : to make that music life ;
Of that indignant pity shape my laws ;
Shatter the bonds that bind fair things to foul,
Change all to freedom save where mine hurts thine,—
Paving all cities with the golden rule.
Dreams you will say, and futile ? No, my girl ;
Dreaming's not futile ; states are built of dreams ;
They are the sculpture, but the dream's the God.
Stoutly we'll carve the stubborn marble, trust me.
Somewhat is done even now. The ground is clear :
Your tyrant——

Fausta. What ! You have not——

Crispus. See ! I stand,—
Pause on the brink of love, the deep cool flood :
One breath,—I take the wave ! How often so,
In the soul's darkness, we have met,—your shape

Stepping down veiled from out the holy place.
But with the vision came the cry: your wrongs
Rang in my blood. So now the tyrant's crushed.
Fausta [*with amazement*]. Not yet!
Crispus. He is in our power.
Fausta. Impossible!
Crispus. I come in time. You hear it from my lips.
How like a tale our lives are!
Fausta. Yes! Oh, yes.
Ah, but it cannot be? You did it, you?
Crispus. Two blows; I struck the first. Theona,—now!
They embrace.
Fausta. Oh, hero! Sweet avenger! How I loathed him!
I could spit upon his corpse!
Crispus. It is. . . . Ah, yes,
The old fierceness. . . . But the voice. . . . This way:
Out of the shadow!
She moves a step, then pauses, listening to sounds as of hushed voices without.
Those rascal priests:
They'll hang about, be sure.
Fausta. No! Were they there?
The letter said at cockcrow I must pray,
Kneeling before the altar of the goddess,
Then you would come. Is it not wonderful,—
The things they do?
Crispus. Knaves,—felons!
Fausta. Hark again!
The place is full of whispers!
Crispus. Leaves,—bats,—fancies.
Night, the old conjuror, king of the Chaldees,—
He plays us tricks a thousand; have no fear:
The dusk is passing; come, we'll go outside.

He tries the door.

God ! It is locked !

She screams, and stands pointing from behind a column.

Fausta. There ! There ! Two eyes !
They glared upon us ! Crispus, we are watched !
O let me hide ! I wish I had not come !

Crispus. Not to meet me ? Fie, little craven !

He goes through the adytum door and returns.

Herclé !
No way out there ! Now Pluto take the rascals !
They think me a Decius playing Anubis ;
They'd humour me, the scoundrels ! Well, no haste ;
Here's light enough for love.

Fausta [*crouching in the corner*]. I am afraid.

Crispus. Why should you fear ? You do not understand.
Theona, they have not told you : I am the Cæsar.
Ah, little goddess, Cæsar will keep you safe.

Fausta. I'll be a fool no longer. . . . Oh, sweet name !
" God's dream "—" Theononar "—call me always so.

Crispus. And is it not your name ?

Fausta. Mine ?

Crispus. Yes, you told me so.

Fausta. I ?

Crispus. At Diana's wood.

Fausta. O yes,—perhaps.
How foolish that I fear,—my noble Crispus !
Are you not strong as Constantine ? Nay, Rome
Detests him, for he builds another Rome
Here, at Byzantium,—not wisely as I think.
At Rome my brother is remembered ; there
We are safe ;—safe anywhere : you say he is crushed :
O could I think it ! . . . Let them talk. He slew

My father and your mother: he deserves it.
Has he not flung me to your arms, my Crispus?
I have no shame——

Crispus. What's this? [*Sternly*] Come to the light!

Fausta. O what a voice!

Crispus [*beckoning authoritatively*]. Come to the light, I say!

Fausta [*breathlessly, but with a show of pride*]. I do not choose. They'll see me.

Crispus [*fiercely*]. To the light!

Woman, who are you? . . . Fool that I am! Why ask?
"He slew my father." Herclé, that's light enough.
You are the Empress: own it!

Fausta. Have I denied?

Crispus. Not shame enough: your treason's mighty frank.

Fausta. Indeed you are no man to turn upon me.
You said yourself that he should die.

Crispus [*coldly*]. Who die?

Fausta. I will not say. You know.

Crispus. "The tyrant"; ha!
And so you thought I meant your husband.

Fausta [*tearfully*]. Yes!
And he is,—he is a tyrant!

Crispus. He is none.

Fausta. You will find out.

Crispus. I said—Licinius.

Fausta [*amazed*]. What? . . . [*Peevishly*] O I know not what you mean. I am trapped!
You brought me here. It was your trick, that letter.
The priests are in the plot. You seek my ruin.
'Twill serve you well,—yes, help you to the throne.

A confused murmur of voices is heard without.

Oh! The noise grows! There's clamour all about us;

Eyes in the wall! Can I not hide? Anywhere!
Behind the goddess. Heavens! There's no escape.

Crispus. None, Empress, none. You hide not behind the gods.

The clamour without grows gradually louder during the following, and the light of dawn steals in.

Fausta. O Crispus, I am wrong; a weak, bad woman.
No, not all bad, but bound to one I love not.
I do not think you did this. You are noble.
You lost your mother; ah, you know the loss.
He slew my father.

Crispus [*in a hard voice*]. That is true.

Fausta. And my brother.
Yes, and he rose by us. Then Crispus, listen:
I saw you, and,—I'll not excuse myself,—
I loved you: it was wicked, but I loved you.
And now you will kill me for it.

Crispus. I shall not kill you.

Fausta. You'll tell him,—it is the same. He'll not forgive.
[*Baring her bosom.*] Stab me instead! Stab me, I say! It is
More man to kill with swords than with a tongue.

Loud cries without. "Ave Auguste!"

Crispus. Do you hear?

Fausta. No, what?

Crispus. "Ave Auguste!"

Fausta. He is come.

In a wild agony of terror she runs hither and thither; then like a wild animal scrambles for footing to climb the wall to the adytum.

Help me!

Crispus. You cannot. And there's rock behind.

Fausta [*sinking down on the step,—in a broken voice*]. His heart! He'll have no mercy.

Stretching out her painfully clasped hands to him.

You have ! . . . Oh !
My babes ! They too will die ;
[*Bitterly.*] That's well for you.
They are your rivals ; do not fear them now.
This is your ladder to the throne. The world
Is full of ladders, and the rungs are men ;
Dead men,—my father and my brother,—he
Trod both their corpses ; you will tread on mine.
O Crispus, and I loved you !

Crispus. That is true.

Fausta. Is love so wicked ? But I could not help it !

Crispus. Woman, you should. Your love can kill a man.

Fausta. Oh ! Oh !

Throws herself at his feet sobbing and kissing them.

Crispus. Rise and be calm ; there's nought to fear from me.

Cries without. Break in the door.

He paces the floor ; pauses and picks up a letter ; reads it to himself ; then paces again, and suddenly stopping looks down upon her.

Crispus. We may escape alive. . . . I cannot say. . . .
One of us may. . . . Now listen ! If I could save you,—
What of my father ? My mother was a saint.
She laid a charge on me : she made me vow
To ward from him the wounds that stab the world :
I vowed it ; then she died. True women worship,—
Monstrous their power of worship ! She was right :
He is a king of men ! He loves me not,—
No matter : he is great ; he props the empire.
Well,—to lose me—he'll not feel that so much.
Have you a soul ? They say you have. Then think !
Can you forgive the wrong he did your race ?
Cease playing traitor, play the wife, the mother ?

Fausta. Yes ! Yes ! For you : I will do all for you.

Crispus. Light women promise lightly. Think again.

Fausta [*despairingly*]. No, let me die. I am weak. It is better so.

[*Passionately*.] I cannot. . . . Yes, I will. . . . You are so great.

Crispus. Here's promise of a change. Look; here's your letter.

Fausta utters a cry of horror and astonishment.

Crispus. How came you to write that?

Fausta. I did not,—never!

Crispus [*sternly*]. Woman, do you deny this?

Fausta. Oh! . . . No! No!

Only in water, and I rubbed it out.

They said . . . the gods could read . . . they only.

Crispus. So! And they have. Full many things, O Empress,

Written in water on our hearts they bring to light. . . .

Going to the altar and lifting his hands as if in prayer:

Mother, then this to you.— [*Casting the letter on the fire.*

This is your altar,—

This fire burns upward from the heart of God.

After a pause:

Empress, take comfort; I vow to save your honour.

The doors of the temple are flung open. Fausta falls in a swoon. Enter Constantine with guard, and Bombo. He pauses at the entrance, while Perdix addresses him, still playing the rustic priest with gestures of servility. During the dialogue Crispus, attending to Fausta, is partly concealed from view by a column of the temple.

Perdix. And then, O Ineffable, he comes to me,—
Me and my popa here,—he'll tell thee, lord,—
And asks admittance ; which for our good report
We did refuse ; for that this lady came
To offer private prayer for your safe coming,
And bade no man intrude. But though we spake
Civil, he natheless, hot and angry, jerks out
" Dog, let me in, or swallow this ! " says he,
Drawing his sword ; whereat,—O pardon, lord !
For that he seemed an officer of rank,
And hath, they say, command of mighty forces,
We could but yield ; and thought no harm ; but natheless
Listened and heard ; and what we heard not liking,
Ran in all haste for succour ; and meseems
God watches over majesty ; for lo,
There was a thunder of much horses' feet,
And o'er the hill you rode, and deigned to hear us.
But what he said we pray you will not ask.

Constantine. Tell on !

Perdix. I pray you ! I pray you !

Bombo. Buzz ! buzz ! buzz !
Captain, be midwife to this ducking knave ;
For the love of God deliver him with thy sword.

Perdix. Poor priests are we,—poor slaves of Dindymene,
And loyal to your majesty. We pray you
Spare us your wrath : we could not help our ears.

Bombo. Pol ! They are long ; but shorter than thy tongue.

Constantine. Speak on.

Perdix. " Am I not strong as Constantine ? "
Those were his words : " Half Italy detests him.
He scorns them and is scorned."

Constantine [*looking round the temple*]. Where is the upstart ?

Perdix. Says he: "At Rome your brother is remembered,
Him and your father did Augustus murder;
Also my mother; and his blood shall pay."
Constantine. Aha! What else?
Perdix. Your majesty, he said,
Had flung her to his arms.
Constantine. And she?
Perdix. She screamed.
Popa, what think you? The lady did not seem
So willing as he looked for?
Pantolabus. No, indeed!
Perdix. Here be the witness; my popa here,—and him.
Pointing to a rustic.
Constantine. What did ye hear?
Rustic. More'n I've chewed the cud of.
Uncommon fine he was in making love.
Constantine [*to officer, pointing to Crispus*]. Arrest this man.
Crispus turns and faces him.
Thou, Cæsar?
Crispus. Yes, my father.
This is the Empress. Pray you, call her ladies:
She is in a swoon.
Constantine [*to officer*]. Let her be borne without.
She is carried out; Constantine follows her to the door. As he returns Bombo pulls his cloak.
Bombo. May Bombo speak?
Constantine. What is it, fellow?
Bombo. Ha, ha!
Fausta, thou pearl of wives, thy lord's preserver!
The she-fox with the golden brush went prowling:
"Caw!" cried the corbies, "she will come to harm."
Yet was she keenest hunter of the tribe;
And once she caught an old wolf by the throat,

Once let a wolf-cub sniff her brush,—then, snap !
The cub was last of all the pack ; and now
The great fox lords it, and the wood is his.
Strange ! She ne'er bites but she must weep or faint.
Constantine [*turning furiously to Crispus*].
Well, Sir, what now ?
Crispus. This asks your trust, my father.
Constantine. Treason and incest ! Christ ! He plays it coolly.
Crispus. Blame, Sir, these rascal priests. Chance brought us here.
They scented assignations,—locked the door ;
We, unawares, unwilling, were entrapped.
I pray you, Sir, doubt not her innocence.
Constantine. Trapped,—yes, in truth !
Crispus. They locked the door without.
Call them : they will bear witness.
Perdix [*to Crispus*]. Sir, that's right :
I did it as you bid.
Crispus. " I bid ? " Thou liar !
I never bade thee. Here's a plot, Augustus.
They have some cause to compass my destruction.
Let this be tried.
Constantine. O impotent excuse !
Litter of blackest crimes snatched from Time's womb
Dead, dead, still-born, yet vile : aye, smother them
Leagues thick in lies you shall not hide their vileness.
Crispus. No, father, I have nought to hide, nor blush for.
That we encountered calls for no defence.
I join my force with yours ; the Empress meets us——
Constantine. Your meeting was forbidden.
Crispus. It was unsought.

I swear upon the cross that when I entered
Half an hour since, I knew not she was here.
We first met yesterday :—by chance it was——
Constantine. By chance ! By chance ! So to this den of Isis,
This stew-house of lascivious crimes and orgies,
By chance she is lured, he cuts his way by chance
Into her presence ; and by chance accosts her ;
The doors are locked by chance ; by chance he is heard
To stir old ranklings of her father's death——
Crispus [*passionately*]. Oh, this is false !
Constantine [*furiously*]. Silence, thou traitor !
By chance, I say, he names his mother's death,
As bond of vengeance ; yet not so prevailing——
Crispus. This is all false !
Constantine. Deny it,—your words are rain
Poured to extinguish hell,—deny, then say
How rustics know things that the court knows not,—
That you and I know only ?
Crispus. O my God !
Constantine. Still not, I say, prevailing, he by chance
Threatens, makes brag of power ; by chance she swoons,—
So violent by chance he grows,—brags that forsooth
He hath a puissance more than ours : he'll try it !
We are for the wrestle. Guards, away with him !
Double his guard ; keep watch ; let none have access.
Crispus. Father ! But hear me !
Constantine. Away ! I have heard enough !

Crispus is withdrawn.

Constantine [*to officer*]. We rode too fast ; yet not too fast ; for God,
Who guards us ever with His holy cross,

Meant we should take this felon by surprise.
What is his force ?

Officer. Six legions, at the least.

Constantine. With us not two ; the rest three days behind.
If he strike now then are his chances good.
On this he counted,—laid his trap, but tripped
Reaching to snare the Empress and seduce
Her interest. Now he is caught in his own toils.
Go watch his force ; at the least stir, the arm
Of justice must drop swiftly. Conspiracies
Die downward from the head. We will rejoin you.
Meanwhile, to allay suspicion, go recall him.

Exit officer. Enter Crispus guarded.

Constantine. Cæsar, these semblances are dark ; they need
The light of justice. Inquest shall be held.
Meanwhile, your sword.

Crispus [*delivering it up*]. You gave it me, my father.
It is yours.

Constantine. Also we hear of heresies.
The empire must be one in crown and creed.
To the heart you strike me. No more now. Farewell.

Crispus. O father, had I done the thing you dream,
Nay, dipped one fragment of my soul in treason,
I'd have you pluck this heart out from my breast.
Yes, for there's somewhat lies upon it here
Which had I died in battle you had read :
Then had you known your boy,—would that I had !
But now my tongue is tied. I can but plead
Innocence. Will you trust me for her sake ?

Constantine. Her sake ?

Crispus. Whose memory is our bond, my father ;
Whose name you said should never more be spoken
But we should stand white-robed before her spirit

As to the gods who shine above us changeless.

Constantine. You dare to name her,—you? Look you to your robes!

Crispus. No stain is there; I, unto you and yours,
Am leal; yet since I cannot speak, nor blow
This poisonous cloud away,—since you must doubt,
Doubting forgive! Detain me, if you will,
Captive, dispurpled: time at least will show
Nought was to pardon but a thought too fine
Of loyal pity, and that memory,
And vows that lay a silence on my lips.

Constantine. Sir, as I hope, your trial shall be just.
We live for justice. Knots there are, swift tangles,
Cut by the sword alone: who takes the sword
Must perish by the sword,—that too is justice.
Farewell! You are held prisoner in this place.

Exeunt Constantine and officer.

Crispus. Farewell, my father. [*Alone*] Is it farewell hope?
My God! Their lies bite home! No middle course:
To rebut I must accuse, and——

The door from the adytum is flung open. Enter Theona. She ignores him and runs across to the outer door, evidently seeking escape.

What! The Empress? . . .
That door is locked! . . . Theona,—thou?

Theona gives a cry of surprise.

Theona. My friend!

Crispus. Give me your face, your voice, your eyes;
Let me see through them to your soul, and know
This time I am not cheated in the dark.

Theona [*puts both her hands in his and looks up in his face*]. There,—do you doubt?

Crispus. Right! Right! I have you now.

How did you enter? From the ground? The sky?
I came for you, the gold star of my dreams;
I thought I had you; it was a marish flame!
Fate has the laugh of me. Too late, too late
She drops you like a great flower to my arms.

Theona. Say a poor leaf that runs before the gale.

Crispus. And still the light glows upon Diana's wood,
Still the bowl clinks the marble, still the wine
Reddens the fountain!

Theona. Sure, but men forget?

Crispus. Not the one star they sail by: Herclé, then
They would port helm, and reck not, and be lost!

Theona. O but you mock me! You are strong and free;
I cannot be a star to such as you.

Crispus [*bitterly*]. Free? I'm a captive, girl; kennelled like a dog.
And yesterday I roamed the smoking wave,
The wave that cuffs the quaking shore, and points
Wild fingers at the gloomy skies,—safe there
Though darts flew round me,—ships aflame, spars cracking,—
No odds too many! Now we find our odds,—
A juggler's trick; our wave,—a flush of pity;
Our flame,—that altar! Laugh, Theona, laugh!

Theona. But, Sir, your dress; you cannot be—a captive?

Crispus. They'll strip it off, they'll cry me traitor! Girl,
Like you we took the sky for men to gape at,
Then come down flat! A conqueror yesterday,
Our fame's a faggot blackened on that fire.

Theona. What does it mean? I do not understand.

Crispus. Theona, there was one who loved me, knit
By strange threads to the fabric of my life;
Her father founder of our race's fortunes,
Her kin and mine by the same hand destroyed,

She once a solace in my deepest trial :
If it be fated she or I must suffer,
Then which ?

Theona [*coldly*]. O, if you love her,—you.

Crispus. I do not ;
I pity ; she is wronged. Shall then my tongue
Spit shame upon her, shame to my father too,—
Drive her to shameful death for loving me ?

Theona. Are men so fond ? This is a woman's folly.

Crispus. It is a folly that outshines all reason.

Theona. Yes, O to die, it is not very hard,—
Here at your feet. I could not live their slave.
For me my freedom,—you your sacrifice.

Crispus [*fiercely*]. Christ ! But I cannot ! . . . Ha ! Give back that writing.

[*Rakes the embers savagely.*] Ha, flames, you burnt a brand too willing ! Now,
The sap flows in the flame ; I'll live my life out !
[*Discovers Fausta's letter.*] God ! What is this ? Not burnt ? Here's my reprieve !
Let perish honour : you I'll save, not her !

Theona. I beg you, Sir, think of your own plight only.

Crispus [*flinging it back on the altar*]. Back to the ashes then ! I have vowed, twice vowed,—
Unto the dead strong woman for her strength,
In pity for her weakness to the living.
Aye, we will keep our faith ; fair wind or foul
That tackle holds.

Theona. Nay,—for I love you, friend,—
Though life were sweet, I would not have you break it.

Crispus. Calmly you speak, yet shatter all my calm.
There is a passion in your eyes ; it calls me ;
Lifts me to heaven and thrusts me to the grave :

It is a glory and an agony.
Shall God then beckon to this bridal hour
To wrench us both asunder?

Theona. That He shall not.
I that have called you from the ends of earth
Go whither you go; even unto death:
For death were life, life death for me without you.

Crispus. And death, my girl, to me a thousand deaths
To hear you say it. Love? Oh, it empties earth
Into itself, and still so great its draught
It cries unto eternity to be filled.
This was the deep that in your eyes, Theona,
Called to my deepest; and we meet,—we meet:
It is too late.

Theona. Stay! Let me think! . . . Through there
One can escape: that floor is false. . . . But no;
The way is barred. . . . Look, friend! The priests pursue me.
They would remove me hence; they know perhaps
You come; but I escaped them by a rope;
I dropped down from my bower there in the cliff.
Is the rope fallen? Go look! They must not see me:
They may be watching.

Exit Crispus through the door into the adytum. She watches him out, then furtively takes the letter, flicks from it the ashes, and reads:

"Dear Goddess,—I love the Cæsar Crispus. Give me one hour with him alone and I will worship thee for ever.—Fausta Augusta."

Fausta Augusta! The Empress of the world!
And this the Cæsar: he that crushed my foe,
Licinius the tyrant! Crispus! O brave!
I have his secret! I have power to save him.

Crispus [*re-entering*]. The rope is down. There was no *man* in sight.

Theona. Oh, thanks, my lord. I . . . Pardon ! you are pale.

Crispus. Strange ! And the doors are locked.

Theona. Yes,—why ?

Crispus. No matter.
You have seen nothing ?

Theona. No, indeed, my lord.

Crispus. Girl, to my arms ! Nought, Herclé, like a woman
To make a man a man.

Theona. What have you seen ?

Crispus. Oh, nothing, nothing !

Theona. May not Theona know ?

Crispus. Their dish of lies has soured upon my brain ;
Set me a-nodding to a midday dream,
Conjuring spectres.

Theona. In truth you are very pale.

Crispus. I saw—no matter what ! Fatigue breeds fancies.
I have fought much and little slept of late.

Theona. Beseech you, rest. This trouble will go past you.

Crispus. It may,—it may not. There's a ship at sea
Runs without wind or sound of plashing oars ;
Herclé, no steering in the wake of that !

Theona. My lord, you are superstitious ; all is well.
There is no sight nor sound but happy sunlight,
And the birds singing in the cypress.

Crispus. Right !
A fig for superstition ! We will forget.

Theona. Why look you to the door ?

Crispus. Let us forget, I say.
Love passes soon ; we will be mad with love.
Heart o' my heart, we'll cover us with roses,—
Never a thorn this one day that is ours.

Theona. Not one, my lord, but many. Pray you, Sir,
Make me your squire, to follow you in battle.
Then, if death come, it would be very sweet
To die, just so, together.

Crispus. Ha! that door!

Theona. It is the wind.

He rises and goes to the adytum door. She follows.

Crispus [*wildly*]. Mother! O let me be!

He staggers. Theona supports him.

Theona. My lord, you are ill!

Crispus. Taut as a Tyrian galley!
We'll take old Acheron like the Hellespont.

Theona. Lean so! There! I shall fan your temples.

Crispus. Girl,
Don't treat me like a child. If it's to bear
I'll bear it. [*She kisses his brow.*

Theona. What, my lord?

Crispus. She would not come
If there were passage from this devil's trap!

Theona. Who come?

Crispus. My mother. Did you not see her?

Theona. No!

Crispus. Tall; straight,—just as in life.

Theona. This is a fever.

Crispus. Fever or no, she stood there,—saw us both.
A light dawned in her eyes, as though she read
A destiny in our meeting. Then she turned,
Silently beckoning,—so! That was just now.
The first time she was stooping; then she rose,—
Held out a blossom; it was white. . . . Ah! there!

He points to a flower fallen on the doorstep.

Theona. Jasmine; from the wall. It is a strange delirium.

Right will be done you ; that is sure. Be calm.
Lie so, dear lord, and I shall sing to you.

Sings :

Sailor, sailor, whither away ?
Beach thy boat in the shining bay.
The curlew cries across the sea :
It is my soul that cries to thee.

The shepherd gales on Ida's rocks
Pipe to the clouds ; they go in flocks ;
Slowly along the crags they creep,
Wandering like great herds of sheep.

Sailor, sailor, whither away ?
Follow me up the hills, I pray.
Where the clouds have torn their fleeces
Singing water never ceases ;

Never the golden sunlight fails,
Till to the call of nightingales
A star drops into the night and shines,
A glow-worm through the dusky pines.

Waving corn and honey dews,—
Whether, O sailor, wilt thou choose,—
Crocus lawns and clinging lips,
Or travail of thy toiling ships ?

Sailor, sailor, whither away ?
Beach thy boat in the shining bay.
The curlew cries across the sea :
It is my soul that cries to thee.

Crispus. Whither, my girl, O whither? But your voice
Goes with me, and your eyes. With God the cause:
Let us be true and live from hour to hour.
Yet by all gods I will not see you harmed!

Loud clamour without. Ominously and suddenly it hushes, and a key grates in the door-lock. He takes her face between his hands and kisses her. The door is pulled from without. Theona leaps up, crying loudly:

Theona. Open! Open! Soldiers, come, save your Cæsar!

Enter Bombo, at the head of a body of soldiers; behind him, Athanasius, followed by a rabble of Christians.

The Rabble. The goddess! The false goddess! The harlot! The scarlet woman! Stab! Strangle! Stone her!

Theona [*confronting the crowd fearlessly, and speaking in a high, ringing voice*].

Hear me in the name of Christ, then do your will.

The rabble recoils slightly from curiosity, or amazement at her courage.

The Cæsar is innocent, the Empress guilty!

Bombo. He must not be; the Empress must be innocent.

Theona [*triumphantly*]. I have the proof.

Bombo. You must not have the proof.

The Rabble. The false goddess! The harlot! Cut her down!

Crispus [*forcing them back*]. Ruffians! Away! Away!

Lalage [*running between Athanasius and Bombo*].

Páppa! Páppa! It is my fairy! Save her!

The Rabble. Let her die! Let her die!

Bombo signs to the soldiers. Theona and Lalage are thrust through the adytum door, Theona crying continually: He is innocent! *Crispus*

is surrounded and removed through the other door. Bombo and Athanasius remain. Bombo bolts the door on Theona and Lalage.

Athanasius. You saw ?

Bombo. The dress ?

Athanasius. At first I thought it Fausta.

Bombo. I also.

Athanasius. Came then the Cæsar after her,
Not after Fausta ?

Bombo. Bishop, but I think it.

Athanasius. Did Fausta then decoy him with a dress ?

Bombo. Bishop, it may be.

Athanasius. Then is Fausta guilty ?

Bombo. Bishop, I never doubted.

Athanasius. Why then, fellow,
Save ye the Empress ?

Bombo. Why then, holy bishop,
Slay ye the Cæsar ?

Athanasius. I ? For the Church's sake,
The Church that is the mother of our souls.

Bombo. For the Bird's sake I, thou leathern liturgy :
The Empress was a mother to the Bird.

Athanasius. To save her we must rid us of the harlot.

Bombo. I will not, for the Bird's sake, for she loved her.

Athanasius. Remove her to a convent. She can give
Earth unto Cæsar, death to the Empress Fausta,
And to the damnèd Arius the Church.

Bombo. I will remove her ; yet I grieve for Cæsar.

He goes to the door and is about to turn the key.

Athanasius. Rightly he suffers, but for the wrong crime :
Stay ! Here's Lactantius, ever bent on mischief.

Bombo withdraws the key. Enter Lactantius.

Lactantius. Would that I had ten winters off these limbs !

Too late ! he is gone !

Athanasius. The Cæsar,—yes, he is gone.

Lactantius. God's vengeance light on him who wrung that sentence !

There was a motion in the Cæsar's camp,—
Great lamentation, for they heard his plight.
Some leapt to arms ; which when Augustus knew
He took for disaffection, and at once,
Prompted by evil counsels, gave the word.[10]
[*Calling to the guard at the entrance*]. Run, soldier, tell them Augustus stays their hand.

Athanasius. Hast thou authority ?

Lactantius. Soon . . . but ah, too late !
When like a flood truth comes, and memory——
My God !

Athanasius [*to the soldier*]. Do you hear ? You obey him at your peril.

The soldier shrugs and remains. Exit Lactantius.
Tipsy singing without :

Yo ! Yo ! Hólaboló !
We'll rip old Nick, and muzzle
Beelzebub,
And gulp our grub,
Get drunk and punk and guzzle !

Tipsy soldiers enter and speak during the song.

1*st Soldier.* Save us, your worship ! We've come to see hell's throat.

Bombo. Behold the holy bishop ! Away ! Away !
Here comes his majesty.

2*nd Soldier.* Be off ! Yo ho !

Exeunt soldiers. Enter Constantine, Lactantius, and others.

Constantine. Vex me no more, Lactantius. It is spoken.
We have no purpose in this visit here
But to resolve these miracles they prate of.
[*To officer.*] You say a figure rose up from the ground:
What, from these stones?

Officer. Yes, here, my lord.

Constantine. Bring water.

Lactantius. If I hold silence the stones will cry aloud.
I will not, though thou slay me. Take my life.
I'll sell it for a single day of his,
And die more rich than kings are.

Constantine. Not one hour.
A moment wrecks an empire. Sir, his crimes
Make all chastisement bankrupt.

Lactantius. Proved, they might.
They are not proved; thy Justice bit her lips:
She sat upon a floor of dark suspicion,
Loading her scales with anger and with haste.
Not this the Justice thou hast clothed and crowned;
Her court is in the patient soul, her motions
Fixed as the heavens are. Be thy proofs so firm?
Behold those clouds! Their flanks are scarpèd mountains:
God sends a breath and blows them into air.

Constantine. Blow Etna from his base and budge the Titan;
Thou shalt not move this mountain of his guilt.
Enough! I will not hear thee. Thou art suspect.
Let him be watched, my brothers.

Dashes water on the floor angrily.

Bystanders. There! A crack!
It runs away.

Constantine. Now bring me axes. Stand aside.

Lactantius. The stones cry out: thy proofs run off like water.

Constantine. Silence! His guilt hangs not on their denouncements.

Bombo. The grey old man of Gaul,—ha, ha!—his pate
Is riddled through with cracks and cranks and treasons.
Try him with water,—ha, ha, ha!—he'll leak,—
Splutter like Neptune.

Makes a sly run at Lactantius and flings water on him. Loud laughter. Bombo meanwhile runs to the adytum door in sudden agitation: a cry as of a child in agony is heard. It dies down; Bombo shows relief, and assumes once more his mocking gesture. The floor has been wrenched away. They all crowd round and look down beneath the trap-door.

Bystanders. Ropes there! . . . And pulleys! . . . And a wheel . . . and a windlass!

Constantine. Fetch me those priests.

Officer. My lord, they have departed.

Bombo. Sweet to my nostrils the smell of ancient incense.
I sniff the eternal gods. Dead, dead as rats!
Thou only livest, Hermes,—thou, O Mammon!

Lifting his hands in mock prayer.

Sly god of winks and shuffles, prosper trade;
Cause that corruption flourish, rascals thrive;
Grant, for thou canst, to felons great estates
Rank unto hucksters, squalor unto toil;
Let wag the oily tongue and lick up honours;
And may salvation be great merchandise,
And priestcraft profit. Now unto thee, O Mammon,
Might, majesty, dominion henceforth, now
And for evermore, world without end. Amen.

Constantine. No place for mumming!

Bombo. Save thee, lord! I pray

For the good estate of—— Ha! my bird, my bird!

Lalage is heard shrieking as if in extreme agony. He struggles with the bolt.

Lalage! I come! . . . That beast is killing her!

Draws the bolt, and the door is instantly thrust open. Enter Lalage in triumph with Theona, whose skirts she holds.

Lalage. Páppa! You silly! Locking up my fairy!
Now you are nicely caught. I was not hurt.

Seeing the Emperor she shrinks back ashamed. Bombo throws up his arms as in despair. Constantine meanwhile has been gazing down through the trap-door.

Constantine [*looking up*]. Empress, you are here! You can throw light on this.

Theona. I can my lord. [*Holding out the letter.*

Constantine. Quick there! I see a glimmer.
Haste! Run! Delay the sentence! [*Exit officer.*
[*He turns to Theona.*] What is this?

Theona. I found it in the ashes. [*Laying it back.*
Take it out.
It is a little letter, O my lord,
But a great heart that would burn it; and, my lord,
He loved her not; 'twas you, my lord, he loved.

Constantine [*reads*]. O rank! Where is the Empress?
[*To other officers.*] Send again,—
This ring in case of question. Let the Cæsar
Return with you reprieved. Haste for your lives.

Officer. But if——

Constantine. If me no ifs; bring him, I say.

Exeunt officers.

[*To Theona.*] Say, child, how comes it that you wear that dress?

Theona. Ask of the priests. Alas! I am their slave.
My father was the victim of Licinius.

Constantine. You say, "He loved her not." How know you that?

Theona. He told me.

Constantine. You, child,—to you, he told it?

Theona. Yes.
Long since we met; he found me here again;
But first in darkness took her shape for mine.

Constantine. Ah!

Theona. Then I came, escaping from the priests.
He was imprisoned. Oh, not willingly
I tell what he would hide.

Constantine. For my sake, child?
Better the truth!

Theona. And, O my lord, for hers;
He pitied her. He would not shame a woman.
Some bond there was between them. They were both
Bereaved of kinsfolk,—both by the same hand.

Constantine [*sternly*]. Whose hand?

Theona. He did not say.

Constantine [*to officer*]. Here, take this woman.
Put her to the torture. She is his accomplice.

Theona. Yes, O my lord, if he must perish, I too—
I too would perish with him, for he loves me.

Constantine [*changing his tone*]. Enough! She speaks the truth.
[*With sudden passion*] "By the same hand,"—
This hand, this murderous hand, this hand that brags
Of justice——

Theona. Do it now, my lord,

Constantine [*with momentary exaltation*]. I will!
There is yet time. It shall be so. For God

Bends all things to our purpose. This befell
That we might know our instruments, what staff
To lean upon, what stubble fling away.
Invincible, incorruptible, our soul,
Our dynasty shall reach out through the years,
Lay hold on Time through this our well-tried offspring,—
Yea, as the Father Almighty tried His son,
Revealed and reconciled Himself to man,
So art thou tried and taken to my bosom,
Thou piece of pure fidelity——

Sensation: all eyes are turned to the door. Enter Fausta, pale and dishevelled.

Fausta [*wildly*]. Where is he?
The Cæsar? They say he has confessed. Oh, falsely!
He did no wrong. Do what you will to me.
It was——

Constantine. Madam, we know the truth.

Fausta [*kneeling*]. Forgive!

A groan of horror. Enter soldiers bearing the dead body of Crispus on a litter. Fausta recoils and remains weeping in the rear. Theona flings herself on her knees beside the dead body.

Constantine [*with agony*]. My son!

Lactantius. Stabbed to the heart! O cruel!

Constantine [*waving Theona aside*]. Go, child!

Theona [*wildly*]. Yes, for I yet may find him.

Stabs herself.

Lactantius. God! So swift?

Constantine. The sun-bird hath his mate. Now rope thy words
Into a scourge of thorns! My soul is naked:

Here's license for the lash ; lay on ! lay on !

Lactantius. Nay, I have done ; words choke me ; now remains

No speech save this,—to utter all my soul
In death's interrogation ; for I loved him.

Constantine. O dragon envy ! Blurred and crooked mirror !
How didst thou twist fair features into foul !
Death breaks the glass. I see him face to face,
This man I made, this child I danced and dandled.
[*Wildly.*] O little laughter, wilt not laugh again ?
Rise, boy, and curse me ! There's no hand but thine
Can quench these fires, pluck hell from out my bosom !

Athanasius. This can the Church do only. Be thou baptized ;
Confess, and be absolved.

Constantine. Thou liest, priest :
No water shall baptize me from his blood.
Lactantius, there's a ringing in my ears :
A word he spake : I thrust it from my soul :
Now it comes back to stay until I die.
[*To officer.*] Say, did he leave no message, no bequest ?

Officer. This lay upon his heart.

[*Handing Constantine a golden fibula containing a scroll which Constantine reads.*]

It turned the blade.
He took it off and said, " The gold remembered ;
So shall my father ; give it back to him."

Constantine [*holding it up*]. This gift I gave his mother ; plighted faith,—
Broke it for a rag of purple ! So comes home
My perfidy the root of all these thorns ;
One pierced her heart, one his,—O mine a thousand !
Read ! [*Handing the scroll to Lactantius.*

Lactantius. There's a mist about my eyes. I cannot.

Constantine [*handing it to his Secretary*]. Read thou, and raise the banner of the Christ:
By this he conquers, and I fail,—I fail!

The Labarum is elevated over the body of Crispus.

Secretary [*reads*]. "My mother's gift. Grant, gods, I keep the vow
Made in her hour of death to seal with mine
Fidelity unto Constantine my father.
'Son, keep your faiths. God sends them,'—so she spake,—
'We'll go out steadfast, dreaming as we came':
Her last words."

Constantine. Now hear mine. The Constantine
Who conquered earth is dead: here lies his heart.

Pointing to the body of Crispus.

Avid of toil, of duty sedulous,
The rafters of old Rome he clamped and grappled,
Lent ground and governance to the Vine of Christ,
And gave its branches to the spacious air;
Virtue he loved and justice fortified,
Lacked not a soul to hear the Eternal Voices;
Yet, gluttonous for power, abandoned faith,
Thrust from his heart the noblest thing he knew,
Perjured, betrayed, and built his pride and shifts
Like rotten timbers in all towers he reared.
And now he hears a cracking in the walls,
A great cold flood comes dabbling at his feet.—
There was a chamber sacred and a child:
Too busy with his damnèd majesty,
Him he forgot; grew envious; reared a brood
Of black suspicions for his ministers:
Now he remembers, now he runs to save him;
Too late! The walls have fallen! In his arms
He takes his dead.

[*Throwing himself on his knees and stretching out his arms hopelessly.*] O son! My little son!
[*Rising with a great despair.*]
Build me a palace at Byzantium,
A cenotaph of marble wrought with gold.
I will have pomp and purple, crowns and robes,
Thrones, chariots, gems to mock my misery.
Then when I pace the empty corridors
Bow ye to earth and hold your breaths with horror!
He is more dread than Death, colder than graves are;
No love hath he, no child, no hope, no haven;
His ruins gaze upon the setting sun,
He feeds on ashes from a fire extinct.

THE GUANCHES

TO MY DAUGHTER OLIVE

THE snow lies on the lonely heath,
Where once the bracken shone:
Stark lies the infant earth beneath,
A breast whose life is flown.

But when the elfin winds at night
Their secret songs have sung,
The charmèd world shall doff her white
And rise up fair and young.

Ah, so when o'er my brow shall drift
Cold snows all wintry deep,
One breath there is shall bid them lift,
And wake the child asleep.

Nay, but he wakes: the song is sung;
There's April in the sky:
You kissed my cheek,—we both are young
Together,—you and I.

TINGUARO, one of the kings or chieftains of the Guanches, those gentle and intelligent islanders of Tenerife whom the Spaniards afterwards exterminated, lies wounded in a cave, attended by Maya, an aged woman of his tribe. The cave overhangs a deep barranco or ravine, and opens at the one end upon the Atlantic, at the other upon a plain strewn with the dead; and thither after the decisive battle has Tinguaro been mysteriously borne. To him comes a strange visitant, and discourses of one Anaylé, an Achicarnay, or slave girl, who many years ago, upon the eve of her nuptials with Tinguaro, had been snatched suddenly away; and much that befell her does he learn from this stranger; at whom nevertheless, fearing treachery, the chieftain flings his spear; and thereafter the person of the stranger is disclosed to him. Many other things that Anaylé suffered are related, as well as her consolation, and the manner of those Guanches' death.

SCENE.—*The Island of Tenerife.*

THE GUANCHES

TINGUARO — DE LUGO
MAYA — ANAYLÉ

Tinguaro. Hist ! Ho !
God of the dragon tree
Help ! Art thou dead ?
I took the blade of the carven sun,
I smote on the tree, but blood there was none :
Tabona, horn of the sacred goat,
With thee on the bark—three times I smote :
God of the dragon tree
Help !—Art thou dead ?
Thrice clove I the trunk, and the red blood oozed :
Quick healed the gash, but the land lay bruised :
Our bruises healed not : still they bled ;
And the rocks with our blood are plashed and red.
Old Tinerfe spake,—the holy king,
Whereof the long-robed Faycags sing,—
Rambling he spake : " O sons, be wise,
And hearken before the monarch dies :
Two Gods there be ; the one who speaks
In thunder upon the mountain peaks :
Cheydé his name, his throat is red,—
Flame licks it : thence are vomited

Black oil, and molten earth that slays
Blossoms and flocks and rustling maize.
Terrific is the God ! His feet
Move, and the mutinous waves retreat ;
He turns upon his bed at dawn,—
Earth rocks and bottomless caverns yawn !
His nostrils belch black smoke for breath :
He is the God of dread and death !
Yet, O my sons, less mighty he
Than one ye may know yet never see :
Heaven's lamps that burn like the goatherd's fires
On Cheydé's ridge when night suspires,
Move wafted by his silent hand ;
The sod, at touch of his glittering wand,
Thrills, and the blossoms robe the rocks ;
The cool north wind blows back his locks,
Gold, like the light through the pinewoods shed
When earth is a holy place to tread.
God of the golden apples he,
Acoron, lord of the dragon tree :
Six thousand years the trunk hath stood,
Transmuting sod to purple blood,
And purple blood to golden fruits ;
For Acoron kissed to life its roots.
The ruddy flowers and the russet grain
His children are. If ye be fain
To live and keep my people free
Then worship him in the dragon tree ;
In the hollow trunk shall ye worship him,
At dawn, and the time when days wax dim.
Nor ever doubt Acoron's powers :
Silent, like stars and the growing flowers
He moves, yet mightier he than shocks

That brast the cliff when Cheydé rocks.
The stars peer over old Cheydé's brow :
' Growl on, old hog, we are safe enow ! '
In rage he spews the molten earth :
The blossoms laugh, for the greater girth
His flanks shall yield for their velvet feet
To climb and make the breezes sweet.
Yet if ye doubt, and would feel his spell,
Son, drink of Acoron's magic well !
Go, quaff the waters of love, and lo,
The wisdom and ways of life ye know :
Yea beckon unto your side a maid
All fair of limb and with love arrayed :
Oh, son of mine, if your pulses beat,
And your life grow eager and strong and sweet,
So strong and eager Acoron's powers,
Who swings heaven's lamps and sways earth's flowers ;
If tenderly then ye would fain caress,
Or bravely shield this Loveliness,
So tender and fond, and so brave is he,
Acoron, the lord of the land and sea ;
If, reluctant of strife, ye would yet bestow
In pity your life to heal her woe,
So piteous he, yet slow of strife,
Acoron, the lord of the light and life.
Wherefore, O sons, as in ages gone
The Faycags wrote on the sacred stone,
That men might read when they depart,
So wrote Acoron on each man's heart
The laws of life and the stars above :
Truth, justice, courage, compassion, and love.
Wherefore, O sons, rule so, and be wise
And hearken and know ere the monarch dies :

Old Cheydé is pitiless, Acoron is kind ;
Acoron hath eyes, but old Cheydé is blind ;
This riots in ravine and in fell unruth,
That aboundeth in love and in pity and in truth ;
Acoron is merciful, and mighty, and slow,
Old Cheydé smites fiercely, and he dies of his blow.
Then hearken, O sons ! make ye never a doubt,
Acoron shall live until the stars go out ;
Till the blossoms all wither and the dragon's blood dries
That prince shall ever prosper who on him relies.
Or if, smitten, ye shall deem that his day is done,
Go take ye the blade of the carven sun,
Strike thrice on the tree till the red blood ooze,
And behold if Acoron shall medicine the bruise,
Your sorrows shall be healéd in the God's good hour,
As Cheydé's ruin healeth with Acoron's flower."

Thus spake old Tinerfe in the happy days
When good deeds prospered, winning power and praise ;
But now I strike the tree,—the red blood flows,
The gash soon heals, but never heal our woes !
Acoron's blossom with our blood is red :
God of the dragon tree, help !—Art thou dead ?

A shrill whistle is heard in the distance from below the abyss.

Maya, go look ! I hear the tribal call. . . .
What see ye ?

Maya. O king, I see a carrion crow !
A-many batten in the glen below :
The dead make vultures' harvest where they fall.

Tinguaro. Anoint your eyes, old crone, and look once more.

Maya. A lithe wench, hooded, straight of limb, trips down
Yon rock path, clad in strange outlandish gown :
Running it floats ! [11]

Tinguaro. Naught else ?

Maya. Along the shore
Nine silver stars flash, moving in her wake.

Tinguaro. Whither ?

Maya. This way.

Tinguaro. Fool ! Stars ?

Maya. Now, one by one
Passing beneath the rock-shade from the sun,
Like flashing bubbles on the sea, they break,
And change to men !

Tinguaro. Maya,—the foemen scout !
The glitter was their steel.

Maya. Steel ? What is steel ?

Tinguaro. Our doom. Like waves, we charge, we leap, we reel ;
Dashed on their reef of iron our lives gush out :
Brave blood to lap their feet, and make them laugh !
Dogs ! Crook-beaks ! Clanging vultures of the sea !
Cristo their felon God is : it is he
Who bids them banquet at his table and quaff
Blood ! . . . But enough ! Who leads them ? Did ye name
A woman ?

Maya. Yea.

Tinguaro. They fly them for decoys,
Snaring our puppet kings, their dandled toys,
Whose treason dyes our land with bloody shame.
Maya, we are betrayed ! Now, ere I die,
Take from the treasure cupboard in the wall
A girdle of glowing beads, well wrought and small ;
These clasp about my neck, and let them lie
Entombed upon my heart, since nevermore
A Guanche king, embalmed and laurel crowned,
May sit at meat stark dead, his courtiers round,

Or, staff in hand, and propped against the door,
Stand witness for the dead of living deeds,
If base or noble. Wherefore, when the night
Mantles ye from the murderous Christians' sight,
Creep out, and lay me, embalmed and with her beads,
Deep in the shadow of the dragon tree.
Hear ye? Then fail me not. For soon they come.

Maya. Never! Tinguaro, from his eyried home,
Shall swoop, and hurl the vultures to the sea!—
Ha! ha!—from rocks no devil cares to scale!

Tinguaro. Where laden goats can limp, the flock may leap.

Maya. Old Maya ponders. He who clomb the steep
Was none of them.

Tinguaro. He wore their cursed mail;
I saw it as he raised me, ere my sight
Filmed, and when waking from my swoon once more
Cooled with the spray I heard the torrent roar,
His armour shone above me in the night.
Tell me your thought then, Maya: who was he?

Maya. The old crone, stirring gofio in her pot,
Thinks many pretty thoughts, but babbles not.
Yet wag thy tongue, and mine shall wag to thee.

Tinguaro. Ask: I will answer.

Maya. Say, then, whose the beads
That thou wouldst bid me bind about thy neck?

Tinguaro. . . . Yea, I will tell her. Dead men little reck
What voice shall blab their loves, or blame their deeds. . . .
Woman, Tinguaro loved a virgin slave,
An Achicarnay, yet Acoron's daughter,
More swift, more sweet of song, than mountain water
Poured from some pool where glistening branches wave,
And flowers fling perfume,—such a pool her eyes,
Within whose tranquil glooms, as in the brown

Clear caverns of a lake were wonders shown,
And on its breast a mirror of the skies.
I loved her, and she passed. The Faycags said
Old Cheydé snatched her, knowing full well I swore,
Once king, to bridge a gulf ; that nevermore
Man might look down on man ; for a king should wed
A slave wench. Sooth ! But when the old king died,
That hour the maiden vanished. Goatherds say
An isle came floating hither at dawn of day,
And bore her off upon the ocean tide.
Nor have the rocks her quick feet kissed to flowers
Beheld her since ; nor I, nor any wight :—
So may their tale be true. Yet not in spite
God took her, but to illumine other bowers
Where dwells Acoron far across the main.—
My tale is told. Now, mother, thine.

Maya. Oho !
The Achicarnay girl ! What flies can blow
Maggots of memory in a young man's brain !

Tinguaro. Crone, do my bidding, or I strike thee dead !

Maya. Enough ! I vow ! It is Tinguaro's will.

Tinguaro. And what of him who bore me up the hill ?

Maya. O wise Tinguaro ! As I mixed the bread
It came upon me thou hadst seen a god !

Tinguaro. Nay, deem ye so ?

Maya. Surely ; for who could dare,
Save only they that walk on sea or air,
To drag a wight where flocks alone have trod ?

Tinguaro. Old witch, ye are wise ; for now I mind me well
One fought within our ranks in shining coat,—
Yea, brighter than the foe's. Him, mad, I smote,
Snapping a pike ; then sorely stricken fell.

Maya. The God is with us ! We shall conquer yet !

Tinguaro. Yea, even now: if I may fight once more.

A shout is heard from afar.

Hist! They approach! Peer out behind the door. . . .

A pause.

Speak!

Maya. Oho, she has leapt! She has them in the net!

Tinguaro. What net?

Maya. The rock-bowl by the dead man's leap.
The crook-beaks dare the spring? Not they! She knew;
And pays their kisses well in Cheydé's stew,—
Tumbling the rocks upon them down the steep.
Like lizards in a cauldron, so they writhe,
Stoned!

Tinguaro. Who stones them?

Maya. The wench who wears the hood,
Oho, their pretty mail! Out spirts the blood!
She stands above, and makes the crook-beaks lithe,
Squirming in travail with the bastard Death,
Ha! ha!

Tinguaro. A friend?

Maya. She wears the foreign garb.

Tinguaro. Even as I thought. They fly the honeyed barb,—
The trull who blows us treason with her breath.
Four chiefs to sell their kin did she seduce,—
Now tryeth me.

Maya. Nay, but she stones our foe.

Tinguaro. A trap. Her true men lurk: those left below,
Slaves guised in mail, are slaughtered for a ruse.

Maya. Ha, ha! That rock went home.

Tinguaro. She shouteth. Hark!

Voice [*from below*]. Carne de mujer! No cabalgo mal!

Tinguaro. My javelin! 'Tis their tongue! A battle call!
One fling, then death: the spear shall reach its mark.

Maya hands him a weapon and they wait speechless.

Voice [*without, singing*].

When the morning fired the pinewoods
King Teguesté watched a maiden
Barefoot trip adown the mountain
Singing blithe, with branches laden.

Maya. O king, the crone is wise : it is a friend.
She enters not until her song is sung,
Knowing the Guanches' custom and their tongue.
Speak ! Bid her in.

Tinguaro. Hush ! Hearken now to the end !

The Voice.

Lissom swayed her neck and bosom,
Like a lily in the meadow ;
Dimples on her cheek were playing ;
'Neath her lashes,—light and shadow.

Wanton at the bush Taybayba
Smote she with the blade Tabona :
Laughing, drew the milk of Cheydé,—
Fatal drops for you, Onona !

Cried Teguesté, " Sweet, I drink it,—
Drink the death-milk of the bushes,
Or the life-wine from your red lips
Or the love-light from your lashes ! "

Blushed Onona, " Oh, my chieftain
Kiss me not for your undoing,—
Me an Achicarnay maiden :
Brief the joy and long the ruing !

They would snatch from you the sceptre,
Me with lashes they would cover !—"
Yet, for dread he drank the death-milk,
Dared she not deny her lover.

Woe ! Ah woe ! The merry smiting
Of the bushes with Tabona,
Of the king's heart with thy love-eyes,
Woe to you, O fair Onona !

With his arms about your girdle
He has led you to the mountain,
Wedded you amid the pinewoods,
Deeply drunk Acoron's fountain ;

Homeward led you to his kingdom,
Laid his kisses on your bosom :
" Now behold your queen, my people,
Fairer than the mountain blossom ! "

Cry the bearded Faycags, " Never
Shall an Achicarnay queen us,
Though the blood of half the kingdom
Like a river flow between us ! "

Then the king took up his weapons,
Achicarnays rallied round him ;
Fighting, he to death is wounded,
They have seized him, they have bound him !

Woe ! Ah woe ! The sweet Onona,
Fairer than a mountain blossom,
Wept, " O king, and I have slain you ! "
Wept and died upon his bosom !

Woe ! Ah woe ! My fair Onona,
That he led you to the mountain !
Woe that e'er the milk of Cheydé
Poisons love, Acoron's fountain !

Tinguaro [*rapt*]. A scent of myrrh, and cedar, and sweet balm !
What dead thing are they bearing through my soul ?
A mummied corpse, it lay so pale and calm,
Whilom a brave young life : she pays her toll
To lank old Death . . . aha, my chrysalid !
Did ye go past his wicket hushed and hid
Like to a mumming moth ? Sly soul, to cheat
Old death with swaddling robes for winding sheet !
Now falls the sun upon her fluttered wings,—
Ah, little shining head . . . she sings ! she sings !
[*Suddenly.*] Maya, throw wide the door !

Obeying, Maya starts back and shrieks.

A trap ! The foe !

A mailed figure enters, at whom Tinguaro flings his spear. Missing its mark, it cleaves the lintel of the door.

The Visitant. Ah ! would ye strike me,—me who loved ye so ?

Maya. O king, the very god ! Thou seest him now.

Tinguaro. Mother, I see ! Love sits upon his brow,
And hope for us poor children of the hills.
Oh, son of high Acoron ! if our ills
Cry to his seat beyond the porch of dawn,
His palace flaked with flowers upon a lawn
Saffron, impleached with shafts of gold, and bars
Of dusky crimson, lit with yellow stars,
Wan at the exceeding lustre of his face :

If there he dwell, or in some other place
Beyond the wash and tumble of the waves :
Yea, if he hear, and hath an arm that saves
Will he not stay this dread calamity,
This vomit of the miscreants of the sea,
Whose mailèd hands have mown us like the wheat,
Till all our hills and hollows hear the bleat
Of many a babe who from his mother's breast
Draws blood for milk to make a Christian's jest ?

The Visitant. Oh, I have heard ; and well a god might weep
Beholding all the grief that good men reap.

Tinguaro. What are the gods then, if, though pitiful,
Seeing the cup of mortal sorrows full
They snatch it not, but bid us drink it up ?

The Visitant. Wise, if there dwell such magic in the cup
That good men drinking it may grow like gods,
And base men turn again to fallow clods ;
If sweeter cups bear dregs with poison rife,
But this the elixir of a rarer life.
The gods farm well when ordure strews their field,
And fair the crop of heroes it shall yield !

Tinguaro. The God speaks riddles. Nay, meseems he mocks !
Our heroes' blood is wet upon the rocks :
The crop it nourisheth the foe shall eat,
And earth no longer feel our children's feet.
The sea-snake grips us, naked, in his mail :
We fight, we bleed, we melt like scattered hail !
The wise old Tinerfe, honey-voiced and strong,
Made for his sons, before he died, a song,
Vowing that, till the dragon's blood should dry,
The right should prosper and the evil die :
Yet on the tree-trunk, as the Faycags said,
I smite, and yet the blood comes thick and red,—

But we, who do no wrong, are perishing.
Wherefore if thou, being god, behold this thing,
Wilt thou not succour ere we all be slain?

The Visitant. Alas, O king, not so the gods ordain:
Good to the good they deal not, nor for wrong
Stripes; nor are bad men weak, nor good men strong.
Conquers the scoundrel foe, thy struggle fails,
And yet through all the ultimate God prevails.

Tinguaro. Out then, vile gods! A just man, I defy
Ye and your justice: go: and let me die!

The Visitant. Nay, O Tinguaro, I would weep with thee!
Ah, weep!

Tinguaro. A queasy god,—if god thou be.
What is thy title, godling?

The Visitant. I am Love.

Tinguaro. Aha, the hawk puts on the turtle-dove!
Doff, then, thy mail: it mocks that gentle name.
Love knew I once: then all our sorrows came:
A soul once soft was wrought to shape austere:
For the hand she touched knew never fraud nor fear,
Like those four traitor chiefs, who batten well
In the lap of their own foes (damned sons of hell!)
Wheedled by a woman! Dost thou know her, god?
A fair snake, so they say: with such a rod
Thy crew will lash us. I, with four, withstood
To pay the price of honour with my blood.
Ha! dost thou weep? Do all ye godlings then,
Slabber to see the god-wrought woes of men?
Yet wert thou not a god, and clad in mail,—
Their poltroon coats,—Tinguaro would not rail:
For "Love," thy name, sounds good to men that live,—
As I lived; natheless, dying, could now forgive
Even the gods, who have wrought my people wrong,

For that ye mocked me with that ancient song,
Stirring the old sweet trouble. Wherefore now,
Calmed with the comfort of thy godlike brow,
My heart would utter things not told before :
How in dark evenings when the virgins bore
Their pitchers to the fount, and babble flew
Light as the babbling brook, one silent drew
Her lonely loveliness away to gaze,—
White arms upon the wall in sweet amaze,—
Melting her love eyes to the twilight key,
Then brought them filled with sunset unto me ;
And in the hushed woods on my bosom spoke
Deep words and innocent, dreamt not of our folk :
Flushed, rapturous nights ! Ah, how should I forget ?
My heart beat, eager till the red orb set,
And at her coming fragrance everywhere
Swam as when scent-balls break and fill the air ;
For when the white form down the dark wood came,
And ran to me in happy huddled shame,
All the night watched us, and a covert breeze
Ran whispering, and the moon-entrancéd trees
Thrilled, and a wonder fell upon the glade,
And the stars sang, " They live, that man and maid."
I lived. And now I die. And love again
Pours the last poison in my cup of pain.
Wherefore I thank thy singing, god, and pray
The gods will mock all Guanches whom they slay,
Chanting before they die such songs to wake
Thoughts of their loved, all dead, for whose sweet sake
The path to death will be the lightliest trod :
Such are the mercies of the mighty God.

The Visitant. Ye spake of one I knew.

Tinguaro. The trull ?

The Visitant. Ah, no,
That other. As for her ye gird at, lo
Methinks she clomb but now the steep.
Tinguaro. And passed,
Seeing thee ?
The Visitant. Doubtless.
Tinguaro. Dost thou think to cast
Thy lot with us, the weak, or with the strong,
As is the wont of gods ?
The Visitant. Ye do them wrong,
Who fight within, for those who strive with woe.
Conquering ye are of the gods. O king, thy foe
Is mine, and I will fight for thee till death.
Tinguaro. Stay then ; for comfort croons within thy breath ;
And speak of her,—that other. Overseas
Haply ye came, from whence the gods have ease,
And knew her there ?
The Visitant. Yea ; but not such her fate :
Heaven is not overseas.
Tinguaro. Couldst thou relate
All that befell her, certes I should deem
Thee very god !
The Visitant. Oh, rather keep thy dream !
Midmost the noble heart a temple stands
Builded of Love with sad remembering hands ;
There e'en the footfall of a thought is hushed
Lest one fair dream be flown, one floweret crushed ;
The sordid city, Life, lies all about,
Kept sweet by angels passing in and out :
This shall I wreck ?
Tinguaro. I wot not of thy speech.
Ere I go hence this only I beseech :
Tell me her doom.

The Visitant. But thou wouldst judge her ill.

Tinguaro. "Judge not, O wheat, the threshed ear in the mill,"

So spake old Tinerfe.

The Visitant. Ah, how wisely spake!

Tinguaro. Tell on.

The Visitant. Anaylé loved. For her Tinguaro's sake
When the old king died she wandered by the shore
Distraught,—a woeful night. The Faycags swore,
Even as of sweet Onona in the lay
(Anaylé taught me this,) to wrest away
The laurel wreath ye swore to wear beside
Her whom ye loved, the Achicarnay bride.

Tinguaro. Ah, true! The braggart goat-beards, how they raved!

The Visitant. "Better I died,"—she wept,—"so he were saved:
My heart's love,—they will kill him!"—But her folk
Bade use his love to lift the oppressor's yoke:
A trodden tribe they were, and fain to fight.
So by the waves Anaylé all the night
Wandered and wept. But lo, when stealthy day
Silvered the heaving sea, a bank of grey
Lifting revealed a barque with monster poop,
Curved neck,—a floating gull's,—and sails that droop
Flapping,—O marvel!—and behind a cliff
The throb of groaning rowlocks! Sudden a skiff
Leaps to the shore upon a languid wave,
Right at her feet,—the tall, white-bosomed slave,
Wide-eyed with wonder, as a mountain doe
Who eyes an intruder from her rock. And lo!
A bulk of jointed mail, not known for man,
Strode, and she sprang aside, and shrieked, and ran;

But fell ; and behold her body, soft and warm,
Captured and crumpled in a steely arm !
There, like a wild bird caught with fluttered breath
She writhed, lay rigid, fixed by a gleaming death,
A blade held flatlings naked on her neck ;
And so was borne through seas and clomb a deck
Aswarm with jerkined sailors, hungry eyed,
Gabbling like crows that bustle where the tide
Flings them a corpse. But she, adroop with shame,
Stood, and her swelling bosom ached, aflame
With anguish of the ribbed and jointed mail
Jambed on her flesh, her struggles' sole avail ;
Then, with a sudden homesick agony,
Leaping the bulwark, plunged the purple sea,

Tinguaro. Woe, woe ! She is dead ! So snaps the golden link :
I have drunk deep of life ; now would I drink
Death.

The Visitant. Though she lives ?

Tinguaro. Anaylé lives ?

The Visitant. Alas !

Tinguaro. God of the dragon tree, hail ! The sign shall pass :
Anaylé lives ! Hope lives ! The fight is won !

The Visitant. Young Lugo saved her : him they called "the Don."
Kindly she looked on him ; for he was fair.
A doublet of green velvet did he wear,
Gold-belted, with a Moorish scimitar,—
So shone apart, a pale and fervid star,
Whom, chained, she watched ; and oft a tremor shook
Her blood (ah guilty !) at a furtive look :
For others made her blush with wantonness ;

He never ; whence, with homesick hopelessness,
Her heart swayed toward him as a thicket flower
Feels for a ray. Then came her bitter hour :
The dear land, watched in waxing agony,
Had shrunk to a grey speck on the circling sea,
So vanished ; and she wept. And then there came
A grinning dog of lust, who spattered shame
Like venom on her wound. And she, being chained,
Drew him with amorous eyes and kisses feigned
Close, and then snapped, and bit him to the bone.
Thenceforth a charnel, where no sunlight shone,
No sister's voice, but in the galliot's womb
Her throbbing heart a hollow pulse of doom,
Darkness about her and a weltering sound,
Waves hurled against the hull with fierce rebound,
Sea-fiends that whistled at her through the chinks,
Blows on the boards above,—each blow she thinks
A death-stroke ; yet life lingers ; till at length
Calm, and a flush of hope ; and, gathering strength,
A bruiséd worm, she drags her chain, and peers
Thro' a crevice ; and a babble fills her ears :
Rough voices ; and a glimpse of mariners
Flinging the dice at play, and many a curse ;
And lo, among them, like a god, the Don !
Who, throwing, cries, as though the stake were won :
" Carne de mujer ! No cabalgo mal ! "

Tinguaro. Maya, the foemen lurk !

Leaps up wildly.

Maya. King, did ye call ?

The Visitant. Help, woman ! See ! He totters !

Supports him while Maya brings water.

Tinguaro. Ha ! Begone !
Doth not Tinguaro know the foreign tone ?

Varlet, ape not the tongue of honest folk !
That was a crook-beak's war-whoop ! Maya, look :
Spy for an ambush.
Maya. There is none, O king.
The Visitant. Nay, O Tinguaro, fear not anything,
But calm thee : fever rages in thy head.
I am no foe.
Tinguaro. Who art thou ?
The Visitant. I have said :
Love ! For I bear Love's seeds, and verily
He, and he only is the whole world's God.
Tinguaro. Aha ! Love clad in christian panoply !
The Visitant. Alas ! but Love must needs go mailed and shod,
Until He cometh unto his own again.
But to my tale.—Anaylé broke her vow.
She loved, if aught be love that dies disdain,
That blurs our dreams, bereaves them of that glow
First love had lit behind the veil of things ;
And leaves them lustreless, a haggard woe,
Wraith of the dawn of love's imaginings,—
A flame puffed out to trail a loathly scent :
Such love De Lugo fostered, such the spark
Fanned with his breath of balmy blandishment.
Even so the fowlers lure a captured lark,—
Starved first, then tamed to trill with blinded eyes :
No more she swims in golden baths of light ;
Her blinking orbs gaze up and dream the skies,—
Feigning old raptures but to illume her night.
So must Anaylé lisp his tongue and take
Bread from his casque ; and with his footfall died
Mirth that his coming stirred ; nor would he slake
Too soon the thirst he wrought, but deftly plied

Engines of crafty kindness, knowing these
Bind the woe-leaguered heart in willing yoke.
So, captive, motherless, she snatched at ease
And drank sweet poison at every word he spoke.
He called her "Zahareña." Afterwards
She knew it named a stubborn fortress lost
At night by slaughter of all the faithful guards.
And so the days sped till the seas were crossed.

Tinguaro. Whither? To where Acoron's offspring dwell,
Apparelled in love and beauty as in a cloak,
Or Cheydé's spawn who rake the bowels of hell
For thunder-throats to vomit balls and smoke,
Or steel to case them from our puny darts,
Or swords to spit our naked bodies on?
Scullions!—For what are brave and stalwart hearts
Matched with cold war-craft and the christian Don?

The Visitant. Alas!

Tinguaro. I rave while sweet Anaylé sighs
Weeping in heaven until her lord shall come.
Tell on: what saw she? Gods, and saffron skies?

The Visitant. A tawny flood that spat its yellow foam
On wastrel marshes and—O wonder!—then
A city girt by walls and golden towers,
A many-fountained city thronged with men
Flaunting in motley garbs like April flowers,
Afoot or mounted, armed, and laughing girls
Black-eyed, at casements and green balconies;
Shrill urchins, shaveling monks, and shuffling churls;
Pageants and pomp, and painted effigies
Whereat all knelt,—she mused the cause, and why
In snow-white weeds they led her into a fane
Thronged, vaulted, dim,—and chanting dolefully

Sprinkled her brow ; then back to light again,
Through pestilent alleys, to a quarter where
None stirred save only hooded priests, who prowled
Like cats at night about a sepulchre ;
Her guide a ghostly friar, robed and cowled ;
Who spake, she wistfully asking of the place :
" Daughter, 'tis Jewry." Then he turned a key,
Swinging vast doors, and one of gentle grace,
A woman, met him kneeling : whereto he :
" The Guanche girl, your charge. Maintain her well,
Answering to your liege, De Lugo, who will come,
When it befits him." Even as though a spell
Bound her his abject slave, she curtsied dumb,
Trembling until he vanished, and once more
The bolt sprang locking them within,—the dame,
Anaylé, and a child, whose countenance bore
Twelve Aprils' sunshine. Merrily forth she came,
Bearing her spindle : " Hath the barn-owl flown ?
Sing, mother-merle ; " but, seeing Anaylé, drooped
Bashful, then gazed, and heart to heart was known ;
And at her eyes' embrace Anaylé stooped,
Kissed and cried, " Sister, I love you ! " So each breast
Met, and the sea-waif found a weeping place.
Weeks after comes De Lugo,—much caressed,—
Thou little fool Anaylé !—for that grace
Of so sweet home. Whom, fondling her, the Don
Bade tell him all things, and if happily
She dwelt and loved her comrades ; whereupon :
" Miriam my mother is ; but Ruth," quoth she,
" Is little sister, apple of mine eye,
Sweet Hadar ! " And he laughed : " Beware their tricks,
My wench, nor shape thy pretty mouth awry,
Aping the jargon of these heretics ;

Less burns thee." Unaware of what he said,
Cherished, she cried: "O Lugo, I would know
Why Miriam weeps all night upon her bed.
My little sister saith they may not go
Abroad as erst; nor ever comes her sire,
Nor that strong brother whom she loves so well.
Rich were they once; but now methinks some dire
Calamity engulfs them, and they dwell
Thralls to that hateful monk. Oh, be their knight!"
"Certes," quoth he, "for thy sake; but, alas,
They trust me not." And she, with quick delight,
Blushing to think their succour came to pass
By her: "O hero, give them cause for trust!
Show deeds!"—"It might be done," he said, as if
Musing. And she, caught up by a sudden gust
Of April passion, cried, "My love! My life!"
And kissed him:—fool! He rose: "I save the son:
That at the least my heart is pledged to do.
The sire is closer captive. He is one
Held of high worth,—a rank and opulent Jew,
Who fed the heretics from his hidden stores:
Miriam knows where the gold is casketed.
Thou hast not seen her delving in the floors?"
His eyes were lanthorns. "No," Anaylé said.
"Watch her," quoth he: "And watch thy balcony;
The youth must enter by a scaling rope."
He spake and passed. And she full joyfully
Stung Ruth to rapture by the whispered hope.
"Oh, you will see him then!" the child replied:
"Ruddy, a tower for strength, well-knit and tall;
Steadfast, like gold of Ophir purified;
Fair as young David when he sang to Saul:
Ezra, my sole, sweet brother!" So the days

Sped, and the young man came. Allah ! that night !
That living corpse ! Those sunken eyes, ablaze,
Lit from a spirit that burned with no respite :
Wrenched limbs aflame, each thought an aspick's fang
Since torture wrung from him the word that sold
His bride to agony ! His accents rang
Shrill, like an anguished infant's, when he told :
" I owned, her father dead, I saw her kneel
Sobbing, and lay his white face to the wall : [12]
Enough ! for this they stretched her on the wheel,
Sweet sinless body ! Dying I heard her call,
' Ezra ! O Ezra ! ' Hark ! She crieth now !
Kill me, my mother ! Tear the torment out,
My heart upon its barb ! " They wiped his brow,
In Ruth's soft eyes Anaylé saw the rout
Of all the wingéd Laughters from her breast :
Flown swallows ere the summer blossom blows,
No more they flock about their ruined nest,
Built in the branches of our April rose.
Miriam strung up the sinews of her soul,
Wearing the woman's mask ; nor overspread
Her noble brow with cinders, as in dole
Her race are wont : yet lo, upon that head
Grey as of ashes from her spirit's flame,
And in her eyes the smouldering of a fire,—
That one night's havoc. Now another came
Bringing the Don, who lit the dame's desire
Vowing the next night he would save her lord,—
Strong Laban, as he saved her hapless son :
Nor could she doubt he would fulfil his word :
Wherefore make ready ere the day be done :
Take wealth and servants well equipped for flight ;
De Lugo shall beguile the monks away,—

Prepare swift horses in the dead of night,—
Meet them, before the East be streaked with grey,
Beyond the city by the Xeres fort;
Where, rescued by the Don's devoted band,
Laban, her lord, would lurk with strong escort,
And gallop with them to the Moorish land.—
Miriam was wrung with doubts, and dreamt of craft;
Whereat he shrugged: "I yield to Anaylé's prayer:
This chance, or none: rough seas, or else this raft!
See yon poor carle, your Ezra! Would ye spare
Laban from tortures worse than his? Then fly.
The Holy Office sits: new engines wait.
What though ye risk your gold? At worst ye buy
Life for your lord." Sweet Miriam sat sedate:
Heard, mused, and yielded. Labouring all the night,
They took the delvéd gold from paths of stealth,
Hid in the earth, brought now at last to light,
Lading five horses with the garnered wealth:
So rich were they, yet abject! Miriam sighed:
"What toils he bore, what perils manifold,
My Laban, lest his loved ones were denied
Safety, or aught that men may buy with gold!
And this perchance we lose! Then are we sheep
Sheared for the shambles of the Nazarene!"
She drew the courtyard bolt. Lo, all asleep
The city lay beneath a sky serene,
The horses neighed: she trembled; no one stirred:
Only the moon-beams lay upon the roofs
White as with snow-flakes. Sudden at Miriam's word
Into the street they plunge with muffled hoofs,
Riding for life, and fancy each arch aglare
With wolfish eyes that watch by day and night.
Natheless for once each monk is in his lair:

Anaylé's love hath put them all to flight,—
Like vampires routed by a wizard's spell,—
Bribed, too, the Alcayde of the Xeres gate,
Wherethrough they dash as spirits released from hell,
To quaff the breeze with hearts that palpitate,
Frantic with hope. In front the silent plains,
The wide Dehesa, tranced beneath the moon,
Dreaming eternities,—for night contains
The exultant secret of a brighter noon.
On, on they ride. . . . Allah! a horse leaps back
Snorting: for lo, a shadow behind a bush!
Quoth Miriam faintly: "Laban!—Love!" Alack!
A yell of strident laughter breaks the hush,
Shatters the holy silence of the night,
As though a crew of fiends from nether hell
Leapt, and the horror of their mad delight
Rang to the stars: and maskéd men pell-mell
Rush on them, snatch their horses' heads, and thence
Hurtle to earth sweet Miriam, little Ruth,
Sad Ezra,—shouting: "Truss the Hebrew hens!
Devils and Jews have neither sex nor youth!
But spare the Guanche." Miriam cried once more
"Laban! O Laban!" Loud that laugh again
Leapt, as they fingered all the goodly store
Of captured gold, and mocked at Ezra's pain.
Allah! that laugh! The stars that sit on high
Looked down and shuddered not; Earth held her peace:
Anaylé heard, and life went rushing by
A dance of hell, a juggle, a fiend's caprice!
That laugh she drew as poison with her breath:
That laugh Spain lived, and prospered thereupon.
O good to die, might we but ask of Death
What answer to that laugh, for life hath none!

Tinguaro. This spawn of hell our heaven beyond the wave ?—

The Visitant. Ruthless these robbers all their captives bind,
And spur for Seville gates ; thy Guanche slave,
For lack of horse to bear her, left behind
With one in mail as guard, who doffs his casque
Grinning ; and lo ! that dog of lust she knew,
Who gained from her a kiss he did not ask,
And slunk back cursing to the galliot's crew.
Now hearken, king ! Thy Guanches loved not blood :
Think ye our mothers felt the thing we feel ?

Tinguaro [*aside*]. The god saith " we."—

The Visitant. —That killing is so good,
So sweet the deadly glitter of the steel ?

Tinguaro. Oho ! The steel !

The Visitant. Yea ! In the moonlight steel,
His laughter steel, and steel within her breast,
And on his thigh a clanging sword of steel :
Ah, for one blow, and then eternal rest !
Walking she feels the hilt, and if he stirs
Or turns toward her, drops it ; once again,—
Courage ! A sudden wrench ! The blade is hers !
Leaping, she swoops, and swings the sword amain,
So cleaves his neck, and as a tumbled pine
Sprawls crashing with its branches on the ground,
He clatters headless, and his blood like wine
Gushes, and all the moonlit plains resound.
Then silence ! And as when a lightfoot doe
Kicks loose a rock to thunder down a chasm,
Alert she stands and quivers, even so,
Watching her deed, Anaylé ; till the spasm
Dies, and away she bounds, and 'neath a tree

Crouches, revolving where to seek a mask ;
Then backward creeps, and from her enemy
Strips his light armour,—tunic, cuisses, casque,—
Fit for her stalwart shape, and in a wood
Slumbering till daybreak, wears them, and anon
Hies forth to mingle with the multitude
Within the gates, and seek her love the Don :
Whom now she meets as through the square he rides.
And, drawing rein, clad cap-à-pie in black,
Thus he accosts his changeling squire, and chides :
" Thou hooded goshawk, throw thy visor back !
What of our pigeon-lure ? Hast swallowed her ?
No game for thee, as ancient tooth-marks show !
Our quarry went to bed, and did not stir :
Pelt fit for roasting ere the noon, I trow.
You missed a zapateado, Pedro mine.
Ten thousand ducats, by the Mass, I swear !—
To Church and Crown the substance, us the shine :
Our fleet is won : an island is our share,
Also, as saith the monk : ' Each Jew ye fell
Is as a penance done, a sin forgiven,
A sword to drive the accursed Moor to hell,
A feather fledged to wing your flight to heaven.'
Even so Fray Fernandez. But look ye, friend :
Who but the guileless Guanche helped us here,—
Her you would break because you could not bend,—
My wand of gold, your twig of juniper ?
Clown ! Why the furnace for thine anvil's play
Is love, aye love ! For so their hearts are bent ;
Till by Sant' Iago, thou hast wands to sway
Ducats and Jews, in time a continent !
Man well thy women thou shalt man a ship,
And virgins win thee virgin isles withal.

That for thy toss ! I had thee on the hip.
Carne de mujer ! No cabalgo mal ! ”

Tinguaro. Maya ! It is the war-whoop once again ;
This time beware ; for sure the ambush leap !

The Visitant. His spear is poised : 'tis well : my words are vain.
Come, love, and put this beating heart to sleep.

Loosens the steel tunic :—the bosom of a woman is revealed.

Tinguaro. The god turns witch ! Ha ! ha ! She bares her heart.
No godling, but our nation's curse, the trull !

The Visitant. Now kill me if thou wilt. I greet the dart.
Empty my life : heaven knows the cup is full !

He flings, and she falls pierced in the shoulder.

Tinguaro. Scorpion, feel thine own fangs ! The Guanches' spite
Sits on that galling point. Ha, doth it bite ?
She groans : 'tis well : not all the Guanche kings
Are coystrils at a harlot's kirtle strings.
Take thou the price of thy foul traffickings :
Thou hast it ? . . . Ha !

The Visitant. But curse me not, I pray :
See, at thy feet she falls, the long-sought day,—
Thy passage bird who trailed her broken wings
Crying to thee long years across the blast.

Tinguaro. How crawls the worm, — soon trampled into clay !

The Visitant. No longer king and slave :—that woe is past :
Death, like an evening, smiles all storms away.
You loved me then : do ye not know me now ?

Tinguaro. Know ye ? The trull ! Ha ! ha ! I know ye well.

The Visitant [*singing*].

When the morning fired the pinewoods
King Teguesté saw a maiden . . .

Tinguaro. Anaylé !

Anaylé. Husband ! Here ! Ah, well I trow
The old wild ballad breaks the bitter spell.
Dear, do ye mind, I sang it in the wood ?
. . . . That kiss it won.

Tinguaro. Ah ! Slain ! And by this hand !
O sweet Anaylé, die not ! . . . 'Twas not good
To change your voice.

Anaylé. My king will understand
Soon. . . . Ah, recall : you cried, " Sing not of woe ;
More than Onona is Anaylé blest."
And then we laughed, poor babes ! . . . Yes, hold me so :
I rally, yet shall die upon thy breast.
So, after all, for me Onona's part.

Tinguaro. Lute that I lost, whom God gave back to me,—
Ah ! And to tear the song out from her heart !

Anaylé. Tinguaro, all Guanches die, but happier we,
Wedded in dying each by the other's hand,
Not, like our kindred, by the relentless foe.
Dear, 'twas to save thee that I sought the land,
But strove with Fate, who wrought our overthrow.
Yet trust in Love ; for sure it is not vain,
That golden vision of our little day ;
Long since it lit, and passed : but comes again
In guise of Death to kiss our souls away.

Tinguaro. She croons of Love, and wears upon her breast
My javelin like a blossom Love had sown ;
Her lips lock in their anguish unconfest,
And all my soul is broken with a moan. [*Anaylé swoons.*
Help, Maya !

They tend her, removing the spear and binding the wound.

She revives: The wound will heal.

Anaylé. Afloat,—afloat upon the unclouded calm!
Pain like a scudding foam assaults our keel;
My soul sits safe with thee!

Tinguaro. Oh, cruel balm
That brings thee anguish!

Anaylé. Nay, but so the flowers
Swoon with bent throats athirst from long desire
Till comes a flash, and in its wake the showers,
And all their purple crowns in bliss suspire:
So pain brings pardon.

Tinguaro. If it were to seek,—
Dove of our pines, their victim even as we.

Anaylé. This say ye, comprehending all I speak?

Tinguaro. Not all. Thou wentest from us bosom free,
Clothed in thy goat-skin, wild fawn of the wood,
A bell of ocean foam, a gale-blown flower,
Flung to the stars. Thou comest back indued
With strange apparel, and words more strange, and dower
Of thoughts we know not——

Anaylé. Yea, and fame accursed!
Traitress, who fell, and doomed her king to die!

Tinguaro. Anaylé traitress? Tell Tinguaro first
The star of dawn goes lechering in the sky.

Anaylé [*after a silence*]. De Lugo's mistress, couldst thou love me still,—
If that were all?

Tinguaro. Poor waftling! Maids, I trow,
Not less than men may flesh the vulture's bill.

Anaylé. Scorn me, Tinguaro! Curse me! Speak not so!

Tinguaro. There rose a mist: thou wert the blue behind.

But wherefore silent, little comrade ?

Anaylé. Me ?

Me dost thou pardon, me the faithless, blind
Deceiver who destroys thee utterly,—
Thee wading deep in death, with sinews knit,—
Thee of thine own soul's ardent adamant rock
Building an altar where thine angel lit
To hold inviolate, though all demons flock
And steely tongues leap up, and lap for blood,—
Thee simple, like the mountain pine, and great,—
Me but an axe to all things green and good :
Both of us may the gods compassionate.

Tinguaro. Beshrew me ! These are words I wot not of.
Thy roses come again and make me brave :
Sister, we'll battle yet for land and love !
Ha ! ha ! That blow ye dealt the crook-beak knave !
Seek thou the trull, and deal her such an one,
I take thy damnèd lord, and head to head
Trunkless we'll lay them kissing,—trull and Don :
If the land hold him, thus the whelp shall wed !

Anaylé. He had a kiss methinks to leave him stark :
One flung her heart at him, and it was stone,—
For such.

Tinguaro. Most bravely done,—to still his bark !
Was't in the Christians' town the deed was done ?
Thrust ye the foul words 'twixt the don-dog's teeth ?

Anaylé. Not then ; for, as he spake, a merry throng
Of girls and boys surged up with lusty breath,
Shouting wild snatches of a wanton song,
Whose words I guessed not, though the giddy street
Rocked with their revel ; yet the tears would come,
Touched haply at their fount by memory sweet
Of maiden mirth within our island home ;—

Haply : I know not ; but I wept.

Tinguaro. And he ?

Anaylé. Flung me his rein and joined the festival,
Going on foot.

Tinguaro. What made these Christians' glee ?

Anaylé. Slowly, ah slowly, up the street they crawl,
Capped in their buffoon crowns, and clad in sacks
Grotesquely bulged from neck to tottering knee,
Lurid with devils painted on their backs
Blood-red in flames : so, mangled hideously,
Gibed at and gagged with steel within their mouths
Throttling their groans of agony and shame :
Old men and young, and mothers, maids and youths,—
Slowly, ah slowly, up the street they came ;
Behind them lords in sable livery,
Lastly the priests, black-robed from head to foot,
Flaunting red flags. The ghostly pageantry
Paused at the square, and all the throng were mute ;
And to the heavens a miserere swelled.
But I, the charger stabling at an inn,
Mingled my mail with men at arms, who held
Guard on the doomed. Ah, Ruth, my spirit's twin,
There, fronting me, behold thy comely form
Sack-robed, thy red lips snaffled, all thy breast
Panting, as sobs a linnet small and warm
Trapped, and to-morrow stiff !—For so I guessed
Her kindred's fate, and peradventure hers ;
Seeing full forty stakes, and therearound
Faggots and flambeaux, and masked murderers
Ready to seize their prey, and have them bound,
And burnt until they perished.

Tinguaro. Burnt alive ?
Cheydé !

Anaylé. And for what? That sum of mortal sins,—
Being of their mothers born.
Tinguaro. And such folk thrive!
Old Tinerfe erred, by Magec![13] Cheydé wins!
Cristo is Cheydé, lord of fire and hell;
And we, Acoron's children, loth of spoils,
Reverent of women, faithful, fain to dwell
In equal love dividing gains and toils,
We to yon miscreants' sickle fall like wheat.
Shall, then, Acoron fail us? Lieth he dead?
Shall we bow down and lick the Fire-god's feet,
And good by evil be discomfited?
Anaylé. Might counts his gains in death, and wins in might:
But Love wins love, and grander still than Fate,
Goes out in purple borrowed from the night,
Luminous, dauntless, and his look saith "Wait!"
But to our tale. I saw: then sought my chance.
Thundered a monk, "The accursed Jews shall die!
Burn them, and lo your Christian arms advance!
Castile shall conquer all the world. And why?
Because, like Holy James, our patron saint,
Ye call down fire from heaven to slay the Jew."
Deep rang his bass; I whispered, "Sister, faint;
I save you." Yet, albeit from signs I knew
She willed to die with Miriam, unrepressed
I added, "Miriam too": and spoke a lie;
Then watched: and when they smote one victim's breast,
And, mocking, dragged him to the stake to die,
While all the people shouted, Ruth dropped down:
Whereat I caught and held her by the back,
And shook her fiercely; and the buffoon's crown
Fell, and her bright hair gushed; and by the sack

I dragged her forth, and kicked the child, and cursed
Feigning the voice ye know; whereat the guard
Laughed, and one cried, "Duck her in water first:
'Twill wake her for the flames!" And to the yard
Where stood the horse I dragged her out of sight,
Mounted, and ripped the sack, tore out the gags,
Then by another pathway spurred for flight,
Bearing her like a beggar child, in rags,
Through Xeres gate; nor paused for many a league;
But shed my heavy armour on the way;
And when the horse fell dead from dire fatigue,
Beheld the mountains; where, at shut of day,
We hid; and begging food, next morning passed
Safely those peaks, and found the Moorish land,—
The turbaned folk,—who gave us bourne at last.
And now, Tinguaro, muse, and understand
In what rough school I learned to carry mail,
To don the hawk, and doff the turtle-dove,
Masking as man.

Tinguaro. Tender and valiant, hail!
Till now I knew thee not. The sun of Love
Burns ever brilliant on the tempest's edge,
Singing wild music to the hearts of men.
Maya, go bring the bowl; for I would pledge
The Guanches' queen in purple Chacerquen.

Anaylé. Stay! There is more to tell. A happy doom
Bound us to Aben Rama, an aged Moor;
Till Ruth grew ripe and wedded; then a gloom
Fell, and my days were as an empty ewer
Standing mid broken shards where fountains fail;
And for long vanished island days I yearned;
And wars were waged, and Moorish women wail
Their men-folk murdered and their harvests burned.

For wondrous are these Christians, O my king !—
More mighty than the Moors, less wise in lore :
Beneath their hands, like plaintains, cities spring ;
The solid earth with fire they brast, and pour
Rocks out like arrows winged with thunder and flame.

Tinguaro. Have we not seen ? What said I ? Who may doubt
These are the sons of Cheydé ?

Anaylé. Then there came
Woe upon woe. The Moorish moon paled out
Bathed in a sky of blood that was not morn,—
That crescent which our ancient Master said
Had passed the light to mortals yet unborn. . . .
Master ! They led thee in chains uncomforted,
Sweet Master who didst break our bonds and deem
Thy slave a daughter, teaching her thy lore,—
Slain for thy mercies.

Tinguaro. So the gods supreme
Give ill for good. But us a fiery core
Of love rings round to hold these wolves at bay.

Anaylé. Allah ! The cursed rack to his limbs they plied.
Whose sin was only that he hid away
Sad hunted Jews : and, tortured so, he died.
Then through the conquering ranks the rumour ran
Dead Aben Rama hath a favourite slave
Nor Jewess nor Moresca, strong as man,
Agile and fair ; and many a Spanish knave
Pricks ears. And then they dragged me to the camp,
And looked me o'er and jested ; and one came,
And broke out laughing : " Ho ! the Guanche scamp !
The barbarita rogue we thought so tame !
Knowst not thy loving Lugo ? "—it was he !
The Don ! And then he cried : " Ye cavaliers,

This is my wench ! " But, turning, tenderly,
" Sweet Zahareña, a word within thine ears.
Hast thoughts of the island home ? " I looked in doubt.
" Home will I take thee." And I blushed for joy.
But softly he, to a friend : " Our Guanche scout,—
Interpreter, and dove-eyed man-decoy :
Mere woman's flesh, but worth a galleon's crew.
Ah, by Sant' Iago, how we moaned her loss !
Whom now the virgin bringeth back anew
In time to help us bear the Blessed Cross
To yonder islands where her kin abide :
Witness the wench is ours, and caught for this :
Carne de mujer ! " laughingly he cried,—
" Mere woman's flesh ! I ride not such amiss."

Tinguaro. " Carne de mujer ! " Ha ! That winged the dart !

Craven to a damnéd cry, I smote my dear :
Let laugh the gods,—for this we play our part.
Ha ! were their dons and devils' litter here,
I'd clap hands on their tongues, like loathsome fruits,
And twixt their teeth old Cheydé's poison wring.

Anaylé. Nay, think of her who blossoms on thy roots
And of thy withering dies,—that she may sing
Her soul out on a pardon from thy lips.
Wherefore I pray thee hear me unto the end.
When Lugo spoke my heart flew o'er the deeps ;
I breathed the pine-woods and beheld my friend :
Spain melted like her squadrons on the hills,
Who, hovering, threat the Moorish herdsman's flocks,
Then pass, and by the blood that dyes the rills
Knows he the clash of steel among the rocks :
Thus, though my life-rills ran no longer pure,
The horror lifted, and the air was wine,

Sparkling with hope. I saw the Spaniard's lure,
Knew they impaled me on their fisher's line,—
Bait for their angling in our fatherland,—
Measured their might, and matched my wits with theirs,
Dreamt of those warriors gathering on our strand,
Encased in steel, and said: "The Don prepares
For us his sickle when the Moors shall yield:
Invulnerable, he conquers: I alone,
I with my wits and body's beauty shield
Our naked folk from sword and hurtling stone."
So Time was laggard till we took the wave,—
Ruth with us, and an infant at her breast:
For all her Hebrew kin the Christians drave
Forth from their shores to perish by sword or pest,
Heaped them like Autumn leaves on foreign lands,
Whose rotting bodies bred a plague whereof
Their succourers died. Wherefore from Lugo's hands
I took Ruth saved as pledge of latent love
Smouldering in him,—ashes in me: and sailed
Joyful, and saw the dim speck on the main
Grow into grey rock fastnesses, and hailed
The dear land of the Peak, my home again,—
Mine, the isle's saviour, so I fondly said:
And thought to seek Tinguaro, and at his feet
Cast me, and cry: "O King, a ruthless, dread,
Unconquered people, full of foul deceit,
Proof against thy poor weapons, snatch thy sway:
Resist them not ill-armed, for vain it is:
But be their vassal, and some happier day
With steel like theirs and craftier strategies
Strike home: till then Anaylé pleads thy cause:"
So would I pray, but might not: since, ah me!
From fraud or fate, I knew not how it was,

Thy fellow chieftains came—they brought not thee.
And I, the Don's interpreter, must tame
The hawk-souls of these heroes till the spell
Shrunk them to hawk-moths dazzled with a flame
Their blinking eyes thought heaven, their wings found hell ;—
So did I dress his lies in liveries
Of virgin truth, and with a net of smiles
Seek to ensnare and hold the angel peace,—
Yea build upon a base of shifts and wiles
Freedom, that only on truth and might may stand ;
So plotting, held my hope in Time and thee,
Till quarrel flamed among the infatuate band,
And peace took wing and fled. Then eagerly
Thee did I seek, but Lugo hindered : till
One night, disguised in Guanche robes, I crept
Out of the camp, and went from dale to hill,
But found thee not, nor knew the sword had leapt,
And dawn beheld Tinguaro's valiant breast
Bare to their steel, and half his comrade kings
Traitors !

Tinguaro. Yet did we scorch the vulture's nest
And drive them to the sea with bloody wings.

Anaylé. At first ; and then I vowed no more to seek
Peace, but dissemble, and turn the hearts of those
Four kings I reconciled, and bid them wreak
Mutinous ruin upon our Christian foes ;
But Lugo snatched me to his ship, and went ;
And, came,—a year being passed in bitter wise,—
Landed, and brought a mightier armament.
And then I fled ; and, wandering in disguise
Found camp and cavern [14] simmering with my shame.
" Snake ! Traitress ! " hissed our folk, until my brow

Burnt as if branded : worst of all that name. . . .

Tinguaro. What name ? O horror !

Anaylé. Thou hast said it,—thou !

Tinguaro. The trull !

Anaylé. The veil is lifted. Nevermore
Thy soul will dream the dead untarnished days,
The hours of dusk when barefoot virgins bore
Their pitchers to the fount, and by dim ways,
Warm, odorous, rock-rose paths we wandered, we
Twin babes upon the fragrant lap of love.
Profaned thine altar,—dark the dream to thee,
Who knowest now, ye cherished no white dove,
Nay, nor a golden hawk ; but, loathliest thing,—
A reptile, fanged, disastrous, who hath stung
Her country, and now beholds it perishing,
Slain by her deed,—ah me !

Tinguaro. That song ye sung. . . .
Sing once again !

Anaylé.

When the morning fired the pine-woods
King Teguesté watched a maiden
Barefoot trip adown the mountain
Singing blithe, with branches laden.

Tinguaro. Stay, or my heart will break !

Anaylé. So changed are all things . . .

Tinguaro. No ! By Magec, no !
Loveliness changes not. It is a lake
Deep at the bases of the world : we drink and grow
Gods !

Anaylé. This know ye ? . . .

Tinguaro. Her dark eyes alter not :
Time hath not sown a taint of falseness there :
Her soul would kill that seed. No bitterest lot

But wrings her essence, purifies the fair.
Thou art Anaylé still. But Fate plays foul.
Wings of a monstrous doom o'er-shadow us:
All deeds benign are soured beneath that scowl,
All faces darkened; times calamitous
Labour to bring forth Death.
Anaylé. Let Time itself
Die in the throes, so thou but love me still!
Tinguaro. Know ye, how came I here?
Anaylé. From shelf to shelf
Of perilous rock I bore thee up the hill,
Masked in a dead man's mail, which by the cave
I hid to don returning with thy food,
Cloaked so from shame, no traitress, but thy slave.
De Lugo guessed mine errand and pursued:
Whom by the leap I led, and slew him there,
Shouting.
Tinguaro. 'Twas thou! And peradventure thou
Who, clad in mail, a god with glowing hair,
Battled for us! Anaylé, I see all now!
Anaylé. Alas, I left our Ruth, and little recked,
Mad at betrayal, what evil might befall
The babe and her, whom none may now protect.
Tinguaro. Who hath betrayed thee?
Anaylé. Ruth, revealing all:
My plot, love, purpose—frozen so in bud:
A poniard pointed at her infant's breast
Wrung the whole tale from her, like drops of blood.
A shuddering heap of shame the girl confessed,
Moaning, "For little Laban's sake I sold
Your life, my sister. . . . Oh! the Christians pile
Live faggots round us; I at arm's length hold
Our prattler from the flames,—how brief a while!

Pushing the brands from him to thine and thee.
Sweet Hadar, thou wilt never love me more."
Her face was steel despair; yet, bitterly
Bewailing my lost chieftain, I forbore
The word of pardon that her mute eyes prayed:
So passed, and left my lamb for wolves to rend:
Her only may the God of the Hebrews aid;
We may not. King, my story hath an end.

Tinguaro. Have ye no hope?

Anaylé. Tinguaro, none save this:
To pluck and wear the gold flower death with thee.
Nay, do not grieve: O love, what ruddier bliss,—
To launch our barque on blue eternity
Battling for right?

Tinguaro. With all the gods in league
To prosper wrong and bring to nought the just?
Anaylé, how have they trapped us with intrigue,
How wrung our youths and maids to blood and dust,
Wrought of us traitors, wantons, fugitives!

Anaylé. No, sweet,—no impotent moaning at our fate:
We will be calm, these last hours of our lives.
Adversity alone shows mortals great.
Day lights the dew-drops on the crimson weed;
Night plumbs the blue, and shows the eternal stars.

Tinguaro. Chanted old Tinerfe, "Though thy people bleed
If good Acoron heal the dragon's scars,
They also shall be healed, nor suffer death,
Nor evil triumph nor the righteous fail."

Anaylé. "In the dark womb of Wrong Right quickeneth,"
Said Aben Rama.

Tinguaro. How shall this avail
The noble dead who die for righteousness?
Enough in smooth and sunny paths to say

"Straight wins the goal"; but in the wilderness,
Where rocks frown horror, and the herdsmen stray,
There shall ye question skies, and look beyond.
Anaylé. "Nay," saith the Moor: "But look within and scan
The scroll of Beauty: 'tis thy golden wand,
Thy climbing rod, chart, plummet, talisman.
Ache not with straining outward."
Tinguaro. Love, alack:
Our ancient comfortable wisdom fails:
We toss, we drift, our anchor runneth slack!
Braving this deep what wind shall fill our sails?
Be thou the God once more and hearten me.
Anaylé. Thus Aben Rama taught: Infinity
Lies all about us. How imagine bars
To life which sees, yet not to unseeing stars?
How bear to think the unconquered beauteous soul
Climbs from the worm to contemplate life's whole,
Then, crowned with blossoms, falls to nought at last,
A shattered mirror breaking all it glassed?
How, quitting hope, watch obscene death deride,
Crumbling to earth all good ye deified?
Or how, when ribald Fate upbraids the just,
And fills our loveliest lips with draff and dust,
When good men set white sails to sink betimes,
And bad men build a palace of their crimes,
When saviours die unholpen, and the brave
Stabbed with the thankless laugh of them they save,—
How, then, while in thee Justice burns, content
Thy mind with life's unfinished argument,
Deem souls but stars that perish in the sky,
Sparks from the forge of heaven flung out to die,
No force arrested flaming into light,

Still potent when it passes out of sight,—
Holding our best a dream imaginéd
Of fools who toss upon a fever bed,
No cresset flame to lead and beacon thee
But glooming waves on dark immensity ?
Nay, O Tinguaro ; sun and stars and earth
Win from the living soul alone their worth :
These are life's tenement : as the life expands
More room, grace, colour, grandeur, it commands :
Beauty is infinite ; our soul but sips
And thirsts the more. Shall life to thy eager lips
Uplift the goblet but to dash it thence ?
Shall our ears ever strain in impotence
To seize yon far-off music faintly borne
From saffron porches of the expected morn ?
O Love, this flesh thy soul builds up and binds
Opens to thee some views, but others blinds,—
Seeing by shadows and the broken light ;
Sentient in one sole key of touch and sight.
But things our sense holds solids are as air
To that strange influence lurking everywhere,
Kindled in lightning : yea, my master taught
Forces there be that deem our solids nought,—
Seen things as highways, and the unseen bars ;
And as night veiling earth unveils the stars,
So death, in crumbling these our eyes, may build
New eyes whose light, a force like that, shall yield
Vision of worlds unknown,—its solids,—those
Which in its path, like shadows, interpose :
Worlds fraught with lovely shapes, and moving airs,
And seas that foam about us unawares :
Yea, verily, now within thee and around,
Sentient to other touch and sight and sound.

For to all lights thy limbs are not opaque,
Nor till man sleeps, perchance shall man awake :
But as an organ player plies the stops,
And on one room of sound the shutter drops,
But others open, and the immortal song
Through other rills and cloisters rolls along,
Awakes new echoes, beats at other walls,—
New heights it climbs, o'er other chasms it falls,—
So when the key of sense shall suffer change,
Fresh lights, fresh sounds, fresh vistas, loom in range,
And love and loveliness endure alone,
Rooted 'neath Time, and not by Death undone ;
Building in many spheres the ordered cell,
Then social order, breaking ever its shell,
New-robed as each worn garment disentwines ;
Winning the more the more its power outshines.
Take heart then, hero : cling through all life's stress
Fast to the clue of love and loveliness ;
The labyrinth is dark and closed in night,
This hath the promise of eternal light.

Tinguaro. These things, O love, Anaylé, shall we see,
We twain who hand in hand must sorrowing tread
The porch of Death ?

Anaylé. So Aben Rama said.
For lo, this flower that flames so radiantly
Out of the rock, a queen within her bower,
A sun in little !

Tinguaro. It is Acoron's flower.

Anaylé. So grew the soul of man, my master taught.
A life core lit : so small it seemeth nought ;
Yet grant it but a crevice, and therein
Some rotting leaves, thy world of wrong and sin,—
Its minute life is troubled : it shall throw

Downward a root to break the rock below,
Upward a stem that feels toward the sun :
O marvel of life, thy story hath begun :
The blind life climbs to seeing, and now reveals
A power within its powers, the flesh that feels ;
This climbs again, and still its powers unroll,
Germ within germ, at last the reasoning soul.
And here, Tinguaro, shall the wonder stay ?
Shall the plant falter till it find the day ?
Myriads may fall and die, but still this core
Quick in the womb of things grows evermore,—
Feeding on death, light, darkness, and distress,—
To subtler beauty, power, and consciousness.
For beneath reason, in thy spirit move
Conscience of right and love of beauty and love :
Source of that miracle of the Man divine,
Of heroes who for Right their lives resign,—
Last offspring of the elemental strife,—
Last, loveliest ! quickened as the primal life
Moved in the lifeless rock ; and no more we
May know its issue in eternity
Than the dead soil may comprehend the germ.

Tinguaro. As those who search faint stars with sense infirm,
Dimly I see.

Anaylé. Ah, not infirm to die,
And give all loves of life and self the lie :
Thou whom no treasonous coil seduced to swerve,
No anguish broke or sapped the will to serve
The end that seemed most noble, fair and right,—
That star which shone within, a burning light,
That mystery strange to thee as life to sod,
Thee, the belovèd of the ultimate God.

For, as the prophet said whom Christians shame,
Making a mock and byword of his name :
" Wheat brings not forth except it falls and dies ;
Heaven is a kingdom that within thee lies."
Conquers the scoundrel foe, thy struggle fails,
And yet through all the ultimate God prevails.

Tinguaro. O love, your boding hath a mighty sound,
Like thunder of torrents when the hills resound,
And from the embattled clouds a rush of rain :
Then silence, sunlight, and the growing grain.
Is this the promise of the Immortals ? Speak !

Armed men are heard approaching.

Anaylé. Hark ! Hide : they come. . . . The Christians !
Ah ! to think
We pluck life's rose upon the charnel's brink !
Our little hour of love. . . .

A Voice without. Rats,—hear them squeak !
Caught in their hole at last : no scuttling now !

Anaylé. Allah ! The Don !

Tinguaro. Ye slew him . . .

Anaylé. Yet he lives !
One kiss to warm the night ! My king forgives
His slave ? [*They embrace.*

Tinguaro. Our Queen !

Enter Don Lugo.

De Lugo. What, Zahareña ? Thou ?
Wounded ? And by this savage ? Nay, forsooth,
(Pardon !)—your chieftain. Holy Saints ! Your eyes
Eat me. . . . You see the virgin makes us wise :—
Cruel : you stoned the Jewess.

Anaylé. God ! Not Ruth ?

De Lugo. Certes ; but fear not. Slaying a heretic

Proves you the baptized Christian. As for her,—
Babes are their mothers' masters,—no demur.
She wore my dress when bidd'n : 'twas politic,—
Though in the issue sad : no fault of mine.
Ambush is rife ; your lord, being marked to bleed,
Taught by your mumming, shuffled skins at need ;
So lives. . . . Your chieftain waits us. Our design
Is to convert him to the Holy Cross,
Then spare him,—if his folk capitulate.

Anaylé. Them also ?

De Lugo. Since our charity is great,—
Haply : we promise not.

Anaylé. And should he toss
To the winds this chance ?

De Lugo. None other comes his way.

Tinguaro and Anaylé discourse together aside.

Briefly, my wench :—his answer : in a word,—
The sacred water or the Spanish sword.

Anaylé. Don, we have done. Tinguaro bids me say
Dwelling austere with waves and mountain peak,
A simpler tongue than yours the Guanches speak,
Holding for one words you deem opposite ;
As truth with utterance, life with liberty,
Honour with noble blood ; hence he lacks wit
To speak forsworn, draw breath a slave, or see
His people bondsmen, letting live his blood
His honour perished.

De Lugo. Thus he answers me ?

Anaylé. Yet if one spark of natural piety
Kindle, or pity of this man's fortitude
Illume thy darkness, Lugo, this I crave :
To lead my wounded king to yonder spot,
Viewing afar the scenes a happier lot

Hallowed before the Christian crossed the wave :
So may he bless his country ere he dies.

De Lugo. Now, by Sant' Iago, a Guanche Bobadil !
Go ! for our charmer ever hath her will.

Anaylé leads Tinguaro out of the cave. Each plucks a flower, and they kneel hand in hand above the precipice in view of the island.

Anaylé. O Land, belovéd land ! thy children's eyes
Weep thee, brave isle, where youth was sweet, and hope,
And love that sounded all our deeps, and bared
The eternal Loveliness whereto we grope :
Hand linked in hand we weep thee, we who shared
No couch of love, whose feet no more may press
The pinewood paths our fathers trod of yore,
Nor any babes of ours with mirthfulness
Rouse all thy rocks to song ; for nevermore
Flowers may we pluck or kisses, save this bloom,
Hope's symbol, laid within the lifeless hand,—
Acoron's blossom, strong to pierce the tomb :
So leap and die,—O land, belovéd land !

They plunge together into the ravine.

LYRICS, BALLADS
AND INTERLUDES

To F. H.

Little the world will heed
  These wild-flowers of my brain,
This wreath of waif and weed,
  My songs of sun and rain :

The loud world little recks
  Even of song divine ;
She will not long perplex
  Her heart with notes of mine.

But you my songs approve
  For my sake and for song's,
For praise of perfect love,
  And fervid hate of wrongs ;

But most of all, I deem,
  Because therein you trace,
Broken, as in a stream,
  Some image of my face.

LOVE'S DAY

" Venit post multas una serena dies."

Tide of dawn silently
  Welled from the orient,
Fount of humanity,
  Lord of the firmament,
    Shine, Holy Light, on my love !

Glide with gold sandalled feet
  Into her sleeping bower,
Dapple the snowy sheet,
  Cherish the folded Flower,
    Beam on the breast of my love !

Weave o'er the whiteness there
  Links for an amulet,
Gleam in the glossy hair
  Strewn on the coverlet ;
    Then, when the nest of the dove

Warms for the bird to wake,
  Fashion her visions bright,
Fall like a blossom flake,
  Soft on her lids alight,—
    Open her eyes to my love !

Watch while she robes in soft
  Raiment her tender limbs,
Beckon the larks aloft
  Choiring her matin hymns ;
    Last, amid meadow and grove

Weave her gay diadems,
  Flowers for our festivals,
Zones of the forest gems,
  Garlands and coronals,
    Posies for plumes of my dove ;

Buds to lie pillowed on
  Bosom where fancies blow—
Lilies of Lebanon
  Nourished with virgin snow :
    Weave, Light and Dew, for my love !

Till,—as an April shower
  Shot through with golden fire
Ripples the alder bower,
  Rouses the wingèd choir,
    Flutters the throstles,—my love

Robed in her loveliness
  Comes to me blossoming,
Fans me with waywardness,
  Wings me, all wondering,
    Skyward. For she whom I love

Yields to the golden hour
  Foison it soweth not,
Scent for the scentless flower,
  Balm the breeze bloweth not,
    Marvels Earth dreameth not of.

Songs in the air will spring,
  Mute though her lips may be,—
Earth is the viol-string,
  She is the melody:
    Rise, my Aurora, my Dove!

Shine, O my Morning Dream,
  Rosy with cheeks abloom!
Flash like a golden gleam,
  Lighting the forest gloom!
    Haste, O my swallow, my love!

Laugh, O my meadow rill,
  Blush, O my damask rose,
Droop not, my daffodil,
  Come where the Iris blows:
    There will we linger and rove,

There, by the river edge:
  I know an arbour there,
Latticed with silver sedge
  Woven with eglatere:
    Comes not a keel to that cove;

Rarely the strand is wet,
  Rarely a sound perturbs
Love in that arboret;
  Only the willow herbs,—
    Red as the lips of my love,—

Whisper, and waters lap,
  Rushes sing lullaby,
Wings of a heron flap,
  Hovers a dragon-fly,
    Far off the reaper is heard;

Swans with the zephyr sail,
  Rhythmic the river heaves,
Idly the water-rail
  Threads through the lotus-leaves :
    Come, O my Blossom ! my Bird !

Moist is the willow mead ;
  Loop up your kirtle folds,
Lined like the silver weed,
  Sweeping the marigolds :
    Haste, whitest doe of the herd !

Fawn with the dainty feet
  Trip through the meadow dew !
Whisper you love me, Sweet !
  Bind me with chains to you,—
    Caught in the toils of a word !

Crowfoot her kirtle brushed,
  Squires of her garment hem,
Daisies her feet have crushed—
  Look ! I will treasure them !
    Fear not ! a missel thrush stirred,—

None else. Ah, lean on me !
  Only forget-me-not
Watches us : wistfully
  Beams on our trysting spot—
    Blue eyes no tear ever blurred.

Me, too, good angels throng
  Now you are near me, love ;
Ah, but the hours were long,
  Ah, night was weary, love !
    Weary from kisses deferred !

Kiss me a thousand times !
Cleave, mouth, as honey bees
Cling to the scented limes
Rocked in the summer breeze,—
Loudly their winglets are whirred !

Me, too, my passion-wings
Fold, and uplift again ;
Flushed with wild hoverings,
Breast to my breast I strain,—
Clasp thee, my Blossom ! my Bird !

Speechless ! ah, how, beloved,
How, when I yearn to thee,
Speak ? Breath is weak beloved,
Passion's eternity
May not be cramped in a word !

Heart-throbs will whisper it,
Summers and winters tell,
Noon and night lisp of it,
Love ! how I love thee well !
Till of two spirits a third,

Godlike, yea, very God,
Love, the Immortal One,
Springs ; and our mortal clod
Melts in the unison :
Till betwixt two wings one bird

Lives and breathes, travelling,
Love-borne, from world to world,
Lapt in eternal Spring,—
Sinks, and the wings are furled,
Folded as now ! For I heard—

Yea,—as a shepherd hears
  Songs in the mountain breeze,—
Hearkened, and all the spheres
  Sang, and the forest trees
    Murmured, and all the air stirred ;

Whereupon, marvelling,
  This knowledge came to me :
Life is the viol-string,
  Love is the melody :
    Sing Bride ! Sing Blossom ! Sing Bird !

If Joy should come to thee when I am far away,
And make thy heart as blithe as birds at break of day,
While mine is sadder than the sobbing of the sea,—
Ah! while thou joyest,
Dearest!
Give one thought to me!

If Grief should come to thee when I am far away,
And thou shouldst lack a loving breast whereon to lay
Thine aching head for comfort in thy misery,—
While yet thou grievest,
Dearest!
Know I think of thee!

If Death should come to thee when I am far away,
And raise the cruel hand Love hath no power to stay,
And blanch thy sweet red lips, and still their melody,—
Then, ere thou diest,
Dearest!
Say one prayer for me!

TO THE URANIAN APHRODITE

Οὐρανοῦ θυγάτηρ, ἣν δὴ καὶ οὐρανίαν ἐπονομάζομεν.

My days pass wreathed in dreams, while Time's dim room,
With bygone years like withered rushes strown,
Hums with the music of Life's shuttle, thrown
'Twixt warps of death, on Aphrodite's loom;
And in my dreams, I hear amid the gloom
Love sing, and shift her framework, and anon
Cast off some wealth of beauty wov'n thereon,
Some blush of art, some plenitude of bloom.
Love! while I lay and watched thy wing'd hand move
Meshed in thy threads, a bright emboskèd dove,
Thy casement opened wide, and Dawn's light shone
From that far orient sea whence thou hadst flown.
Still let me lie within thy lap, Great Love!
For I have gazed too long where light is none.

Yea, I have seen Care's pestilent river creep
Through meadows made for mirth, and fret a bank
Fair with sweet flags and daffodils, which drank
Poison, and perished; I have watched Death reap
June's rarest flowers; and Fate, the tyrant, heap
Gold crowns on churls, on heroes chains which clank,
Thorns on grand brows, and stripes when brave men sank
Bowed with great burdens; wherefore I did weep.

Yet, as the darkling cells in leaves transmute
Rays caught by those frail hands to flower and fruit,
So, when woes touch thy light, O love, they rank
As earth's best beauties ; so thy loom doth prank
Gold threads with gray ; and still the shuttle shoot
A growing splendour, though the warp be blank.

Behold yon moon, the Latmian dreamer's bride,
Fling out one silver kiss, and then grow dim,
Hiding in fleecy clouds until their rim
Glows with her smile again ! So thou dost hide
Thy empyreal countenance, and I abide
The loveliness wherein my senses swim.
But ah, when led by Fate's four warders grim
I pass to darkness—what shall then betide ?
Loss, Solitude, and Pain, dull scouts of Death,
Wait at Time's porch, and moan with tremulous breath
" Trust not Urania's smile ! A wanton's whim,
Flown, it shall leave worn nerve and aching limb
Sport for Death's playtime." Wherewithal Love saith :
" He also is my servant ; go to him :

" He hangs my warp ; he wards my palace gate ;
Within his healing founts the wounded year
Bathes with her swift young Hours, before they bear
Laughing through all the land, in frolic state,
Flowers for the feet of Spring, to celebrate
The day my feet kissed earth, and fanned her air
Azure with winnowing plumes ; yea, all things fair
He lulls and laves that I may re-create.
The prism he holds, and I the dazzling light ;
Which shattered falls in colours, not in night :
He beards the ravening Anguish in his lair,

Stills the loud Hate, and slays the remorseless Care,
  Makes black the heavens to show the stars are bright,
And builds Eternal Hope from Time's despair."

Love ceased her song of Death, and as I lay
  Lapt in my dreams, her swift hand I beheld
  Shifting the woof of wondrous times of eld.
Florence, Rome, Salem, Athens, in array
Passed, like brave pictures, decking still our day;
  And many mourned by man, by fate debelled,
  Whose strength upholds our walls, like oak trees felled,
Their beauty gone like leaves to trampled clay.
  And affluent arts which waxed and waned I saw
  Tattered or mildewed, once without a flaw;
And some like frozen bloom, or founts which welled
Poisoned, or barren brides at nuptials knelled;
  The grace earth aches for, gone to glut the maw
Of Erebus; whereat my heart rebelled.

Then Love to a garden led me, near her grange,
  Busying her hands with herbs of myriad hue;
  Wing'd bees and zephyrs wafted there to woo—
Deft artisans who draped with patterns strange
Fantastic bridal chambers, sweet to range.
  Love, architect of every flower which grew,
  Shaped all those minarets and columns new,
Touched by her wizard wands of Chance and Change.
  Watching these things, O Love! I seemed to be
  A mariner borne across a pathless sea,
And Life a freighted ship which onward flew
Around bright capes, but not one bourne in view,—
  Holding her course, full-sailed, and helmed by thee,
White pinions mirrored in the unfathomed blue.

When day droops, and with purple plumage furled
Dives like an ocean bird in waves of night,
I see thee steadfast, clothed with inward light,
Pilot o'er perilous deeps the enchanted world.
Into the gloom I gaze: salt spray breaks pearled,
Lashing the labouring prow, whose instant might
Is given of fate. Though siren shoals invite,
Though tempests track, and Life be headlong hurled
On some hid reef beneath the Eternal main,
Hearts by thy white arm holpen shall sustain
The surge insufferable and the wreck's affright,
And wrest from anguish ease, from dread delight,
Havens from hurricanes, from Death's disdain
Life, and Eternity from Time's despite.

The dream fades, and again thy shape I see
By mountain, heath, and glen, o'er blossoms bent,
Filling Earth's lips with song, her breath with scent,
Her lap with flowers which borrow sweets from thee:
The rose to praise the blush of chastity,
Dure heath for swains, lilies for brides unshent,
Myrtle for hardy mariners; all intent
To assuage rough toil, and Time's asperity.
And to each hour thy hands new grace impart
From Earth's largesse, and Life's florescence, Art,
As dames for growing maids new smocks invent;
And both, like herbs in fallow acres sprent,
Increase where'er Apollo hurls his dart:
Till Love's close garden grows a firmament.

Dreams wreathe my days, while thou, Love, fashionest
The flame-tipped weeds, and green deep-shadowed trees,
Enkindlest stars like bloom on summer leas,

And mak'st eve's saffron sky a couch of rest.
Man yearns toward thee with hunger and heaving breast,
  And hymns thee in all choirs and symphonies.
  Thine are his altars, thine his sanctities ;
The spheres lie at his feet who lives thy guest.
  When I lacked thee my thoughts tossed evermore
  Like boughs on turgid streams when tempests roar ;
But when thy white hands' touch had brought me ease
Time's casement opened, in the morning breeze,
  And lo ! upon the dim Eternal shore
Hope's rainbow gleamed through foam of troubled seas.

Dear slumbering head, reclined on billowy tresses,
  Moored to my heart, and locked within my arm,
O that the shelter of my fond caresses
  Could keep your life from harm!

The dark bird Sorrow nests a fledgling raven
  In warm recesses of each tender breast:
Is there no safe resort, no quiet haven,
  Where Love unhurt may rest?

"Nest-fellow Sorrow," Love's white bird complaineth,
  "Give me but room to sleep awhile and sing:
Ah, do not drive me out,—for lo, it raineth!
  And thou hast torn my wing!"

Last night, dear love, your cheeks, like crimson roses,
  Bore dew-drop mirrors of the tenderest woe:
Each kissed rose-petal on my arm reposes,
  Caught warmly blushing so.

Ah, could Love bid the canker-worm of anguish
  Grow wings of moonlight moths, and waft away!
Foul thief! he makes my darling blossom languish,
  Yet him I cannot slay!

KET THE TANNER

A RHYME OF MOUSEHOLD HILL, NORWICH. 1549

I

Ho ! Ket the tanner hath saddled his mare !
Ye fat-fed gentlefolk, have ye a care !
By barn and borough, by field and fen,
Bob Ket the tanner goes gathering men.

The sea-brine beats on the wry-blown toft ;
Now empty the hithe is, and barren the croft.
Ho ! grind your axes and out with your staves !
Though poor are we, squires, we be not your slaves !

Bob Ket the tanner hath ridden his mare,
And roused up the yeomen from Irwell to Yare !
I warrant thee, fellow, the fingers shall burn
That grabbed my meadows, and emptied thy churn !

The gentles ha' robbed us of commons and kine ;
They tether our cattle, our pastures they tine !
Come, learn them a lesson, they squires and they lords !
For ours are the ploughshares, if theirs be the swords.

Aye strait were our acres, aye woeful our lot ;
They lordlings ha' gathered the little we got.
Aye dainty their dames be, aflaunt in their silk ;
Our wives go a-weeping,—their babes ha' no milk !

Our wives go a-weeping,—their children lie dead ;
They lordings ha' stolen their milk and their bread !
God's curse on the caitiffs ! To hell wi' the knaves !
We're franklins and freemen, not villains and slaves.

Rip out wi' thy reaper, lad ! Reap thee a squire !
Fat beef and fine capons, lad,—they be thy hire !
Cry, Ket and the Commonwealth ! Loud let it ring !
Bob Ket is our captain, lads ! Ned is our king !

II

Ho ! Ket the tanner hath gathered a host :
They fare from the fenlands, they flock from the coast ;
They march in their hundreds ; they camp on the heath.
The city lies red in the hollow beneath.

Bob Ket is our captain, lads ; he shall command.
He holdeth the town in the palm of his hand.
The burghers are whining ; ay, let them go whine !
Cry, Down with the lordings ! The people shall dine !

Now drag forth the captive ; stand out with 'ee, squire !
Come bow to thy betters, or duck in the mire.
Now shake him like dice, Will ; or devils shake thee !
Bob Ket shall be baron, and better than he.

Go hang us the vermin ! The widow was poor :
Squire drave her from home, with her face to the moor.
Go hang us the vermin ! The widow went daft ;
She caught up her bairns, and she cried and she laughed.

" Though vermin he be, no killing ! " quoth Ket :
" Man's life is God's loan ; would ye take up the debt,
And toss it, besmirched, at the Lender, like mud ?—
Leave that to the brutes, and the braggarts of blood ! "

'Tis e'en as ye list, Bob ; a curse for the hound !
A flog and a kick, and then let him lie bound !
" Ay, flog him," quoth Ket, " but your oaths are in vain ;
The poor were the rich if their curses were grain."

Then he rose, and he cried : " No cursing ! but deeds !
Go, wrench from the robbers their ill-gotten meads ;
No gate and no paling shall lock up the land,
Save for keeping of cattle. Ye have my command !

" The barque to the sailor, the flock to the swain,
The field to the tiller, to each man his gain ;
Away through the county, and do as I bid :
The land of the loons and the lordings we rid."

Lads, tear up the fences ! Lads, set them afire !
Let beeves be a-roasting, all over the shire !
Lads, drink to the captain in gentlefolk's ale !
Hurrah for the land, and the people's entail !

III

Who cometh a-riding with pennon and helm ?
These armies are blister and bane of the realm.
—Come, carve up thy capon and swallow thy beer !
By'rlakin, my hearties, ye've som'at to hear !

King Ned sends a token. Hurrah for the King!
—Quoth Ket, "My lord herald, what word do ye bring?"
Now brayeth the bugle. "Ye rebels, take heed,
And repair to your homes with uttermost speed;

"Whereof, an ye fail, in forfeit ye pay
Your lives and your chattels; but, if ye obey,
Your King in his clemency pardons ye all;
Now hearken, ye rebels, or worse shall befall."

"A fig for the pardon!" Ket thundered, and swore:
"They wights who ha' wronged us may go on that score;
Leal folk are we all, and this answer we send:
'Where the Many foregather, the Mighty shall bend.'"

Hurrah for the Commonwealth! Fling down the gage,
Though war to the death for our freedom we wage.
—Like a sword from a scabbard, the sun in the west
Flashed out, as the heralds rode townward abreast.

IV

Now what be they doing within the town?
The gates they have barred and the bolts let down;
There's a clatter of steel, and a clangour of brass;
And from turret to turret the bowmen pass.

Come shoulder your axes, and tighten your bows!
If they be for barking, lads, we be for blows!
Take pikes for the foemen, and picks for the wall;
The first at a fight are the last at a fall.

A shot from the ramparts! Lads, wheel ye about:
Now cover the miners; now drown with your shout
The sound of the picks as they hammer and hew.
Aim steady, my mates, for our shafts are but few!

What's up with 'ee, Joe? Art thou taking a rest?
—An arrow and kerchief he wrenched from his breast;
He showed them, and moaned as he looked at my bow,
"The wimple for Nancy,—the shaft for the foe!"

His wounds are agape, and they cry to the brave,
"Lads, fight for your freedom: your children ye save!"
A stouter-bred carle never stept in the shire.
To hell wi' the devils who slew him for hire!

Our ranks are an ocean, their arrows a hail!
We besiege them like breakers a hull in a gale!
Our bodies are hurled at their bulwarks like scud!
The troughs of the ramparts run red with our blood!

V

The city is taken, lads: cheer, lads, cheer!
Let victory foam in the froth of your beer!
Drink deep to the captain, lads, waving your swords!
Cry, Down with the hirelings who fought for the lords!

Well met, master tailor: come thread us thy twine:
Our jerkins are yawning, and spattered like swine.
Come, clout them with broadcloth, a groat for an ell,
Or clout we thy pate, and thou hoppest to hell.

From steps of the hostel, " My mates," shouted Ket,
" Ye dared to remember, now dare to forget ;
Lads, kill not the loons who lie low at your feet ;
For life, even life to a lazar, is sweet.

" Offend not a wight in the land, nor a lass ;
Show mercy in conquest and let the word pass :
The hind hath a heart, and the rich man a maw."
—Hurrah to thee, Ket ! thou givest our law !

Now march we in file through the streets of the town,
And many's the maid, in white kirtle and gown,
Will lift thee white fingers, all love to the tips,
And wing thee white kisses blown warm from her lips.

But the dead ! Ah, the dead that lie blanched by the wall !
Ah, why did ye leave us, lads ? Why must ye fall,
And quaff not the goblet of gladness ye brewed
With your anguish and valour, your tears and your blood ?

Ah, the dead ! Ah, the dead ! They are fallen like leaves
Whipt off by the whirlwind, ne'er garnered in sheaves :
The morrow dawns laughing, bedewed from the storm ;
Their bough-fellows bask, for the day is full warm :

But ye lie a-cold, lads, and trampled to clay,
And the wheels of the years will go soft where ye lay :
Dear Memories are ye, our farefellows dead ;
And Hopes are the flowers that have blossomed instead.

Come pledge we the brave in a tankard of beer.
The city is taken, lads ! Cheer, lads ! Cheer !
Alone we may fall, but together we stand ;
And the might of the poor is the weal of the land !

* * * * * * *

[The hind hath a heart and the rich man a maw ;
But strife falleth still to the firmest of claw ;
And blood is a red bright seal on the deed,
For acres to pass from the plundered who bleed.

" The Lanzknechts are coming," the plunderers cry,
And shake in their shoes till the succour is nigh,
Then kneel to Earl Warwick, and call to his braves,—
" Come rid us, we pray, of these riotous knaves ;

" Their weapons are scant, and your matchlocks shall mow
Our varlets like wheat in the fields that they sow."—
Now blush, O ye Britons, who held it no sin
To purchase the Germans to slaughter your kin !

Ket rallied his men and they fronted the foe,
And battled with culverin, billhook, and bow :
But valour ill-weaponed is flame without heat,
And ruin rides hard on the heels of defeat.

The cry is : " No quarter, but slay without care !
The hind is a creature to hunt like the hare ;
The boor is a beast that ye bait like the boar,
No quarter we swear ! "—and they slew as they swore.

The mavis is mute, amid moanings of pain ;
The trefoil is drenched in the blood of the slain ;
Ten thousand blind eyeballs gaze blank at the blue ;
And still they are killing, and still they pursue ;

Nor pause in the chase till they cry in dismay,
" The mouth eats the hand ! There are few more to slay !
These laboured for us : if we slaughter our beast
We must bear our own burdens." And therefore they ceased.[16]

Now women and children, in fair Dussindale
Search weeping their mates and their fathers bewail;
Now silence is heavy o'er hovel and hut:
A sobbing is heard, and the doors are all shut.

And Christ at his shrine in the poor man's fane
Hears the good Ket groan in a rust-red chain,
And a dolorous harvest the long years reap,
For rich men make merry, while poor men weep.]

THE roses all are overblown ;
Full yellow falls the rye ;
The long sweet summer days are flown :
O love !—and I,
Who loved thee ere the seed was sown,
Or winter's tears were dry,
For lack of thy dear love am lone,
And fain to die !

The rose's breath with thee remains ;
The summer's heart is thine ;
Flowers wither not, nor summer wanes
Where thou dost shine ;
Yet here, O love, 'mid bitter rains,
Away from thee I pine :
Ah, say one word to ease my pains !—
Sweet rose, be mine !

THE HOUSE BY THE SEA

PART I

The clock ticks on the old oak stair,
  The wind is on the sea,
The house is lone, the moon rides bare:
  To-night he comes to me!

To-night he comes; the mansion's Head
  Is far away to-night.
"Young wives," my wizened bridegroom said,
  "Make darkest houses bright."

But David in his letter cries,
  "Reef coral lipped! False lure!
Rock of my shipwreck, lit with eyes
  Love's cressets frank and pure:

"To-night, before I sail for lands
  Where death is dropped like rain,
I come, dear Fate, to kiss the hands
  That cut my life amain."

I am not false! Ah, bitter word!
  Yet, love, how should you know?
They lied! they forged! I took my lord
  As from your arm a blow!

They said, " With David duty sways
  Throned over lives and loves ;—
The goodness he delights to praise
  Your meek submission proves."

" Goodness," I answered, " is not twined
  Of maxims thonged and trite ;
It is not mail to cramp and bind,
  But wings to lend us flight."

My lover's letter, brave and cold,
  Came after : forged it seems !
It bade me wed a purse of gold
  To aid a father's schemes.

" How could I yield ? " My love ! My own !
  I am a helpless girl :
Not false ! Ah, no ! Fate sucked me down :
  You stood not nigh the swirl !

Too late you come ! We can but brood
  Till madness crowns our loss.
Gold ! Gold ! They'd melt down flesh and blood
  To win an ounce of dross !

I rave, who wife-like should prepare
  A winter for my guest :
Kill all love's flowers, long-sown and fair,
  He scattered in my breast.

My heart is filled with sweet alarms :
  A wild bird flutters there. . . .
Ah, should he fold you in his arms ? . . .
  Nay, foolish heart, beware !

Then were I lost indeed ! Ah, no,
Beloved, this shall not be.
Yet if he sail ? . . . The tempests blow,
The wind is on the sea !

The marquis till the month be passed
Will sojourn far away :
David, if this wild weather last,
Whate'er befall, you stay.

For, love, I dreamt of you asleep,
And this word came to me :
" The sheets are white, the sea is deep,
There's death in both for thee."

I quail at omens void of sense :
I fear, yet feel no grief ;
My bosom heaves in wild suspense ;
I waver like a leaf !

Thoughtless, I wear this girlish gown,
And roses in my breast ;
And let these frolic tresses down,—
As he would have me drest ;

Fool ! robe in russet, matron-wise,—
Restrained, not April-free !
Fool ! doff thy dainty zephyr guise,—
Thy sham virginity ! . . .

Alack ! for once 'tis not amiss . . .
Ah, God ! the love we bore !
That we must close it with a kiss,
One kiss, and meet no more !

I will be brave, and freeze like stone,
And act the better part . . .
Come now, my love! The house is lone,
A cloud is on my heart:

Come, love! I feel a tremor creep!
The wind is on the sea!
"The sheets are white, the sea is deep,
There's death therein for thee!"

PART II

Great mirrored rooms are comfortless;
My haste forgot a cloak;
How ghostly white my midnight dress!
How black the panelled oak!

Here did my resolution fail,
And here upon his knees
I sank, and here my love did sail,
Not over raging seas,

Not to the death he counted bliss
With me no longer kind,—
But, chartered by my trembling kiss
And blown on passion's wind,

Into the haven of our love . . .
Ah me, how deep his voice!
Ashamed I lay, too dazed to move,—
Ashamed, yet I rejoice

That, winnowing leaves of perished woe
With sighs from passion's bower,
I watched love's crimson petals blow
And plucked with him the flower.—

What would you think to see me, Sweet,
Beneath your chamber glide
Spectral, with noiseless naked feet?
Ah, would you think I hide

The footprints of our love in shame?
Nay, 'tis your safety, dear;
For, ere dawn sets the sky aflame
We must be far from here.

Young men have courage, old men craft:
The young must fly the old;
None knows the shooter of the shaft
Poisoned and barbed with gold.

Here is the missing note! Who'll guess
I let my lover in?
The room is clear,—my heart not less,—
Of any mark of sin.

Sin! Is it sin to break a cord
Close woven of lies accurst?
'Twere sin to spare a name abhorred
And let a great heart burst!

And now I mount the stairs to lie
Nestling beside my dear;
Him softly wake, and with him fly
Far from our woe and fear,

Far from a land where frauds are thick
As flowers in paths of love,
Far from their snares. . . . Ah, quick! Ah, quick!
I hear a step above:

You foolish boy! You should obey;
For now you wake alone . . .
Who strides o'erhead that sudden way? . . .
Who laughed? . . . Ah, God! his groan!

PART III

Fear not, old man: he feels no spite!
His eyelids will not move.
We are but effigies in white
Froz'n on a tomb of Love.

I wept an hour, but waked him not,
Nor has one angel heard;
And when you chuckled hell forgot
To take you at your word.

The doors of heaven and hell are fast:
None knows if heaven there be;
We are all shut out alike, and cast
Into the same black sea.

Yes, I will talk, and God may hear,—
You also, if you will.
Nay, keep your cloak, you need not fear;
This night-robe is not chill.

You plead your act was natural :
  Doubtless to you it was.—
My tumbled sense will not recall
  How all this came to pass.

Ah, yes, you conned his letter ; hence
  You lurked about the place :
The journey was a mere pretence ;
  You witnessed " your disgrace."

I must not " fight against my fate ; "
  You hold it was my crime.
The deed is done : you " look for hate,
  And hope for love in time."

You'll hush the deed ; you " know a way : "
  'Twere best for both you said.
We are not in England, as you say,
  And have not much to dread.

—'Tis well ! I deal with God alone,
  And vow to speak no word.
We three will stand before His throne,
  And He will hold the sword.

Murderer, you blench : there is no need.
  Be still, and go not now.
You rouse the house ? It is your deed :
  I do not break my vow.

Be still ! and hark to my discourse :
  Old man, I too am old !
My name is Love Enslaved,—and yours,
  My housemate, Greed of Gold.

White-robed I sit, a marble prize,
A lurid wraith of Pain,
Love's cenotaph which money buys:
Old man, admire your gain!

Why did I bend just now, and stop?
—(Your voice is sharp and hoarse:
Is that door closed?)—I did but drop
The point of my discourse.

My grievous fall confessed, you say,
You pardon me. But I?
Will I forgive? No, not your way!
Yet kneel! We can but try.

Confess: by fraud you won your bride.
The phrase fits not your mind?
The means you thought "were justified":
Ah, well: I wax more kind.

The hand her husband's blood made wet
Anne took,—you know the tale:
You are my Gloucester. Stay, for yet
My pardon may not fail.

Draw near, my lord. Kneel so! Beseech!
We slaves bow down to force,
And worship boldness. Here I reach
The point of my discourse:

I may forgive—I cannot say.
No, sir! I will not kiss!
I *do* forgive you—dog! this way!
And this—old man—and this!

* * * * * * *

John, move that screen. Shut out the light:
The strong sun fades and warps.
Nay, do not linger now: all's right!
Drag out my husband's corpse.

Fear not the stain upon the bed;
'Tis of the Flower of Greed.
The petals, crushed, are sour and red.
Call none: there is no need.

My dear dead mother would complain
"You are too tender, sweet!"
That is the first thing I have slain;
I am not nineteen yet.

I vowed to wake my love, and fly
With him to other lands. . . .
The poison works. . . . John, let me die
Alone. . . . He understands.

Break, flood of bitter sorrow, o'er my head!
My love is dead!
No more life's maze with roses garlanded
We two shall thread;
Blown petals mingle with the clay instead
For Death to tread.

Strew sapling leaves and lilies on her bier:
I shed no tear.
I stand and shout to death, "Give back thy prize!
Thou hast no eyes
For all the fair things thou hast filched away:
Give back thy prey!
Or, if thou wilt take all, and nothing rue,
Then take me too."

Love for our hungry souls a table spread,
Whereon we fed;
Death overturned and trampled on the bread:
"Now eat!" he said.
Love's fount we bathed our feet in when they bled
Runs now blood red.

Break, flood of sorrow! May thy waters deep
Tumultuous sweep
Through every sluice and channel of my soul,
Until they roll
All joy, all fear, all care, all hope away:
Then will I lay
Mé by my love, and bide with her Death's curse,
Or God's reverse.

SONNETS

I

BEETHOVEN

[*To G. M. H.*]

As from the nebulous elemental sea,
  Wand-smitten by the Eternal Mind, Earth rose,
  A foam-born Venus on whose breast repose
Rose, myrtle and amaranth,—her canopy
Azure, her footfalls timed with Bacchic glee,
  And thundering rhythm of Birth and Death, and throes
  Of Races fluctuant, and the impassioned woes
Of Orpheus wailing his Eurydice ;
So at Beethoven's beck there grew above
  The waves of sound a wonder-world, where dwell
Old gods and nymphs in many a mazy grove ;
  And in their midst—his deepest song—a well
Where Psyche washes whiter than a dove
Ere lapped in slumber with immortal Love.

II

OF A CERTAIN SOCIAL CHIROMANCY

" . . . Referre negas, quali sit quisque parente
Natus, dum ingenuus."

HORACE, *Sat.* I. vi.

STRANGER who would my offered palm peruse,
You are to me a fair untravelled land ;
My life meets yours as on some golden strand
A new keel rings, a voice acclaiming news
Of foreign ports, and crying, Comrade, choose !
I lay my pinnace freight at your command,
Free merchandise for him who takes my hand,
Nor murmur if the commerce he refuse.

Only I charge you in my sovereign's name,
The king of Love whose livery proud I don,
Seek not to read my fortune, rank or fame :
Honour makes all men equal ; they alone
Who boast themselves our betters, blind to shame,
Bite dust beneath us, beggared by the claim.

III

MAN AND THE ELECTRIC THEORY[21]

[*To K. N. H.*]

Are then the souls of men as moonbeams flashed
  Momently on a dark unfathomed sea?
  Starlets which glance, break, vanish, so are we,
Whose lives fly off like wheat-chaff, winnowed, thrashed,
Whirled from Fate's threshing-floor,—who unabashed
  Mouth mighty words and plumb eternity
  With ell-rod dogmas; whose philosophy
Through centuries reared, is in one decade dashed?

Yet if this visible universe conceals,—
  Plane of a deeper solid,—worlds which lie
  Hid, and God's finger flashing through the sky
Unmasks all substance, then the soul that feels,—
All Space her mansion,—Nature's stuff reveals:
  Death doffs our robes; we sleep; we may not die!

IV

VICTOR HUGO

1804–1814

In 1804 Napoleon, the reviver of despotism, was decreed Emperor, and in the same year Hugo was carried from Elba to Paris. In 1814 Hugo, child of the revolution and poet of "Les Misérables," made his first literary essay; and in that year Napoleon, crushed, quitted Paris for Elba.

That hour the Titan Corsican first dared
To knot, ignite, and wield, as scourge and brand,
The lacerate life of Freedom's Motherland,—
That hour the herded nations, maimed and scared,
Fawned at the Titan's feet, though late prepared
To take the freedom from Her bleeding hand,—
That hour Fate timed with black volcanic sand,
But Love mixed gold therewith lest men despaired.

Napoleon thundered, Hugo lisped; but Hope
Hid with the babe; and when the thunder sank,
And all the tyrant's legions, rank on rank,
Melted like mist, athwart a bright'ning slope,
Robed in a golden shower of song sublime,
Hope fired all plains and pinnacles of Time.

V

AN INCIDENT FROM BOCCACCIO

When Guido Cavalcanti, Dante's friend,
Met certain prosperous fellows, such as weave
Their Bacchic garlands, bragging they achieve
Life,—they through graveyards passing, bade him bend
His steps their way; but he "This place may lend
Power to your hest; yet see! I gain reprieve."
Then leaping o'er the wall, "Sirs, by your leave,
Now am I free: for here your territ'ries end."

The market, forum, and convivial board
Are tombs for those who sit thereat too long;
But they who walk erect amid the throng,
Who, seeking Wisdom, heed no Siren's song,
Whose minds are gates wherethrough great floods are poured,—
They live, wax rich, and grow amid their hoard.

VI

THE BERNINA SNOW-MOUNTAINS FROM THE VALE OF ROSEG

In vista seen, like truth down glooms of thought;
Or pure long dreamt-of love, hard won and late
By wanderers through dark ways of wrong and hate;
Or, down the travelled years, keen memories, brought
Brightly to view; or shining palaces wrought
Of hope amid impending cliffs of fate:
So gleam thy peaks,—virgin, inviolate;
Pastures where light feeds only; ever fraught
With shadowy undulations; like a bride
Whose soul Love's pinions, passing undescried,
Ripple, and lo, the snowy depths revealed!
And as fair spirits, by sorrow purified,
Shine forth, so 'thwart Heaven's blue, where smiles abide,
Beacons thy eternal snow's refulgent shield.

VII

EVENING

O SOFT last hour of evening, when the gold
  Dapples the meadows, and the timorous breeze
  Toys with the lindens, where the drowsy bees
Murmur ; and clouds than Love's own bosom roll'd
More whitely, sleek'd for Hesper's roses, fold
  The couch whence Dawn arose ; and Titan trees
  Brood o'er their shadows, and athwart the leas
Glide phantom forms of love romances told :
O evening, gracious, virginal ! I gaze
  Into thy tender eyes, and no more pine,
  But gather hope by that bright look of thine
That Love, who gave thy grace to close our days,
  Shall of His bounty grant more grace to shine
On bournes unknown, and far untravelled ways.

VIII

BELOVED EYES

Dearest, beneath your lashes' shadow bides
A troop of poignant loves which, passing, seem
To trail their wings reluctant as a dream
Flitting at sunrise over ebbing tides
Of azure sleep; and like twin bashful brides
Bowered in dark pines beside a tranquil stream
Your eyes are; and their light, as snows that gleam
Where naked Psyche in her chamber hides.

And though of all your eyes' deep splendours, Love
Is lord and king, he ruleth them unseen,
Like God the wonders of the skies above;
But if Death blur those mirrors, Love, I ween,
Will weep beside my soul till God's white dove
With wings of pity once more wash them clean.

IX

GEORGE MEREDITH

Woven of sunlight was his deep romance,
And waves, and woodland green, and flashing dew;
A labyrinth there, man's soul, and his the clue;
And laughing elves, who twitch to a 'vitus dance
The cockerel strut of cant and arrogance;
And, fresh as tossing boughs across the blue,
Fair through all flaws, strong women, staunch and true,
Sweet essence wrung from poignant circumstance.

For, seer and singer, long he dwelt apart,
Nourished in secret Nature's close embrace,
Taught in her lap to know the Father's heart,
To glean a light from Fate's averted face,
And chime with crashing chords of godlike art
Triumphant fugues athwart life's tragic bass.

SIGHED a lad unto a lass,—
Now my nights may never pass
But my thoughts upon the pillow,
Like the branches of a willow,
Dip and dance and dabble ever
O'er a passion-swollen river:
Is it madness? Is it fever?
For it was not always so.—
Said the lass,—I may not know.
(Sang a birdlet, Tweet-ah-tweet!
Yet they say that love is sweet!)

Laughed the lass unto the lad,—
Now my nights are never sad,
For betwixt my gown and bosom
I have sewn a faded blossom,
And the thread of glossy hair is;
So forgotten all my care is:
Is it magic? Is it fairies?
For it was not always so.—
Sighed the lad,—I may not know.
(Sang a birdlet, Tweet-ah-tweet!
Others' faded flowers are sweet!)

Moaned the lad,—Your mirth will pass
When I lie beneath the grass!
Laughed the lass,—The charm might save you
If the flower and thread I gave you:
When I stole them you were sleeping;—
They are better in your keeping.
Then the lass too fell a-weeping.
Yet it was not always so:
Is it love shall win us woe?
(Sang a birdlet, Tweet-ah-tweet!
How those lovers' hearts do beat!)

THE PARK [17]

I

THERE is a park where oaks of Atlas girth
  Drop delicate goblets, wrought for elves' carouse,
And Titan beeches elbow mossy earth,
  Beneath whose gnarlèd roots the faeries house.

The dews that bead the grass are elfin wine:
  The best they cull from off the spiders' thread;
The hawthorn boughs, on whose red fruit they dine,
  Will shake a silver shower-bath on your head.

To sway them you must stand full four feet high;
  And then you top the bracken maze, and stoop
Hiding, and stir no limb, or else they spy,
  And catch you quickly ere you call out, "Whoop!"

II

You dare not wander down the gloomy wood
  Beyond the scented limes across the stream,
For there you meet the hag who wears the hood,
  And bearded men, with horns, and eyes that gleam.

They watch you down the cloistral grassy track,
  And though you run like mad, and say a prayer,
One creeps behind unheard, and grabs your back,
  And hauls you through the greenwood by your hair.

There, too, the gray bird lives who haunts the dell:
  You need not fear when overhead she flaps.
What lies beyond the wood I cannot tell:
  The farthest edge of all the world perhaps.

III

But if you pass the woodman's hut, and skirt
  The hazel copse, alive with foxglove spears,
And cross the field (the scarecrow does not hurt)
  Just through the gate a marvellous thing appears.

Beside a leafy path a temple stands,
  Built wondrously in white, and domed within,
Like fanes of heathen gods in far-off lands:
  To worship there, they say, is deadly sin.

'Twas built, no doubt, a thousand years ago;
  The plaster cracks, and shows the bricks inside.
Perhaps the gods live still: for who shall know
  What strange wild things among those thickets hide?

IV

Hard by this temple once I met a man,
  Who stopped and said his father laid the bricks:
Yet all folk know 'tis named the TEMPLE OF PAN:
  These cottage fellows talk such fiddlesticks!

They love not ancient tales of nymph and faun,
Which tell how once a girl became a flute ;
And how fays dance in rings upon the lawn ;
And why by day the nightingale is mute.

To such I speak not ; but to those who twine
Child-dreams like gossamers round some leafy lane,
I say there towers no carven dome or shrine
So wondrous fair as that bright woodland fane.

V

'Mid other marvels ambushed in those glades,
Behold a cedarn chalet, ringed about
With sweet sequestered lawns and tuneful shades,
Lapped by a river plashed with lightning trout.

A trellised balcony belts that fair domain,
Whence opes a garnished chamber, quaintly stored
With ancient shields and weapons, doubtless lain
Long hid, the relics of a barbarous horde.

Brave not the paths of yonder reedy swamp,
For haply there those savage spearsmen lurk,
And if you pluck the loosestrife, out they ramp,
Knives clenched atwixt their teeth for bloody work !

VI

Wherefore 'tis wiser not to dally here ;
So turn and lightly run across the park.
Yet wait awhile to watch the slender deer,
Or scan the blue for yon mad minstrel lark ;

Or stretched full length along the river side,
Peer at the weedy wonder-cities dim,
Where in and out the water people glide:
Then shake your head, and—whish! away they swim!

White sheep are harmless, but beware the dun!
Go slowly by, and passing turn not back:
The souls of bad men dwell in every one:
That must be so, or wherefore are they black?

VII

The bracken mazes yield a sport so rare
That gods and babes alone the like may know,—
Or those who keep their youth without impair,
Or, like brave Cortez, conquer Mexico.

Each ardent pigmy player, dubbed a knight,
On threefold quest fares knee-deep through the ferns—
The first, a frond of perfect ivory white,
By which the doughty knave an earldom earns;

The next a harebell coronal, frail as fame,
Which crowns the finder duke; and last of all,
To win a kingdom, or a queen's acclaim,—
One rare white bell-flower, matchless! virginal!

VIII

Around a rotten oak the king holds court,
His throne, like many thrones, a stump decayed,
His laws, like many laws, of futile sort,—
Like most, far more debated than obeyed.

Oft was I king ; but when in later days,
Passing I viewed again my realm and throne,—
The stump how dwarfed ! How shorn of charm the maze !
Shrunk, too, the Titan trees, the faeries flown,

The woodland void of fauns, the swamp of foes,
The fane vile stucco, and the chalet paint !
Ah, should I pass again, mine eyes shall close,
Lest on Time's pitiless road I fall and faint !

Woeful sighs are dead men coughing ;
  Charon lies there in the offing !
Soul, abide not by these rocks,—
  There they hide in huddled flocks !

Maid, ah move thy cabin far ;
  Nest where Love hath hung his star ;
Round his brakes the long night through
  Silver flakes on waters blue

Fall unheard, but Philomel,
  Mystic bird, their echoes tell ;
All the night Love's star transmuting,—
  Silver light to silver fluting.

Stars depart ; the darkness dies :
  In thy heart Love pours his skies :
No more death lurks round thy portal
  Love gives breath and life immortal.

Bride sow laughter,—golden grain ;
  Reap it after ; tears will rain :
While the grain grows, ere the reaping,
  Love weaves rainbows from thy weeping.

LOVE'S ADVENT

Passing the world's loud workshop, lo, within
I saw vile weapons forged of Death and Woe ;
The fires belched blood with labouring breath and slow,
And hideous births, begott'n of Greed and Sin
On ravished Want, respired amid the din.
The anvils rang, a curse in every blow ;
The great wheels groaned, the cranks throbbed to and fro,
And Love's brave handiwork was crushed therein.
To fields I fled where lavrocks dwelt alone,
Frenzied with joy to find the world so fair ;
There rivers crooned their songs through meadows sown
With pleasures no man plucked, and buxom air
Sighed fragrance ; yet man breathed the blast of care
With avarice foul, or mirk with anguished moan.

Returned, I said, " Hath yon Cyclopean curse
No single eye wherewith to see the stars ?
Bears earth's fair face no blush amid her scars,
No verdant spot where noise and smoke disperse ? "
Yet still the more I searched the gloom grew worse ;
Till, passing through a gate with brazen bars,
Behold, a green abode which no moan mars !
Wherein I heard a virgin voice rehearse
Sweet things of love, with ever one refrain :
" Ah, Love, why dost thou tarry ? Stay not long,
Lest Time should turn the flowing tide of song,

And all my hope grow fear, my rapture pain,
And men make mock, and say I sing in vain :
Ah, wherefore dost thou tarry, Love, so long ? "

The anvils rang, the sweet notes welled and wept,
Like nightingales beside a thundering shore ;
Entranced I heard, and, as the long day wore,
Upon a poisoned runnel bank I slept ;
And dreamed a flood through vernal valleys crept,
And on its breast a shining pinnace bore ;
And through those brazen barriers evermore
From each loud anvil's throat reverberant leapt
The great word " Love " ; for Love himself was come.
Nor were those voluble orbs and shaftings dumb,
But sang of love like circling spheres in choir ;
And ruddy tongues cried " Love ! " from out each fire ;
And throngs swarmed forth like bees with eager hum ;
For man and maid and child cried " Love is come ! "

But when Love's argent barque ashore they bind,
And Love leaps forth, the crowd awestruck recoils.
" Nay, come, beloved ! " he cries, " Behold my spoils !
Pelf buys not these, but he who seeks shall find."
The workmen shout ; the pelfmen shrink behind,—
Whose luxuries bow their backs in tumid coils.
But when Love sighed " For such the weary toils,"
They sloughed them, nor when once erect repined.
Then on that place of travail Love's white wand
Smote, and the fabric sank beneath the stream ;
And labour laughed for joy of Love's sole bond :
And homes waxed fair ; and man, to man grown fond,
Sang " Hail, king Love ! thou dost alone redeem
The world from woe ! "—Alas, how vain the dream !

My soul sang loud upon a summer day,
" Hark, winds and waters, meads and mountains, hark!
I am Earth's king! My charioteer, the lark,
Hath whirled me sunward; whence, with many a ray
Crowned, I advance triumphant. Lo, I tread
Paths paved with flowers, with rainbows canopied;
Fate is mine element; with Hope I play:
Eve's crimson clouds are pillows round my bed;
With stars for sentinels the world I sway!

" To whom shall I surrender? Not to Pain:
He is my minister; nor yet to Grief,
Who finds me fruit beneath each faded leaf.
I count my conquests not by foemen slain,
But won to service. I have wrestled long
And found no wrestler yet to do me wrong.
Nor shall Time's mightiest terrors, ranked amain,
Affray me. Hark, O Death, to my bold song!
Come forth, and I will fight and win again!"

WILLIAM MORRIS

Died Oct. 2, 1896

Weep, eyes that beauty brightens!
  Mourn, hearts whose wings are song!
Whom love of man enlightens,
  And hate of wrong,

Weep, gathering in your treasure!
  The giver now lies mute;
The garden of our pleasure
  Bears no more fruit.

Death, king of all disaster,
  Makes of his work an end,
Bids us bewail a Master,
  The poor a friend.

Son of the Skalds who chanted
  At Olaf's wassail board,
His sagas bloom transplanted
  From firth and fiord.

Therein with bright amazement
  We look, as one who peers
Through some fair pictured casement
  On other years;

Dreaming, we look and listen :
Stout Harpdon's basnet rings,
Rhodope's garments glisten,
Rapunzel sings :

Brynhild the Victory-Wafter,
Gudrun and Sigurd pass ;
Holt, stead, and glowing rafter
Adorn the glass.

The tones waxed rarer, stronger ;
The brush glow'd in his hand :
He wields it now no longer ;
The wizard wand

Falls ; but the windows kindle,
Fixed in the Muses' shrine :
Their lights in dark hours dwindle,
At dawn they shine ;

And as he lies beneath them,
Transfigured in their rays,
We kiss his brows, and wreathe them
With sad, sweet praise ;

Singing, Our poet craved not
The well-earned laurel crown,
But held his course and raved not
At fools' renown ;

Not ours the sole bereavement :
Art held our Master dear,
Who, by his life's achievement
Made Art sincere ;

Who, blameless, shrank from blaming,
  Was gracious to disgrace,
Nor learned the trick of naming
  The hapless base ;

But still for Freedom striving
  Lived brave and debonair,
Wat Tyler's soul surviving
  In Chaucer's heir.

Day bears her torch away ;
The hills with her kiss are blest ;
The flame has changed to a full-blown rose,
Whose petals strew the West.

No more her footprints fleck
The moss in the leafy shade ;
The pines entangled her golden hair :—
She fled, and would not be stayed.

The winds lost in the woods
Have laid themselves down to rest :
The lark is singing his last glad song ;
The thrush is in her nest.

Fly o'er the hills, fair day !
And gladden another land !
My love awaits me when you have flown :
He takes me by the hand !

More fair than you, fair day !
Is the light in my love's eyes ;
His voice more sweet than the throstle's song,
His smile than azure skies.

He takes me by the hand !
His kiss is upon my cheek !
Hush ! little heart ! Do not beat so loud !
My love his love would speak.

His words are silver wings ;
They bear my soul afar :
Farther than you can fly, fair day !
Beyond the farthest star !

To a land where we may build
On imperishable sod,
A home whose rafters are noble thoughts,
Whose guest is Love, our God.

SAINT THOMAS IN INDIA [18]

I

CHRIST risen, commanded Thomas, saying " Begone !
Proclaim my word in India ! " but the Saint,
Weak in the flesh, would suffer no constraint ;
Wherefore He called a dark-browed merchant, one
Who dealt in slaves : " Abbanes ho ! I bring
My slave," the Master said, " a bondsman skilled
At carpentry, well tutored, meet to build
A palace for Gundaphoros thy king."—
Abbanes turned : " Art thou His slave ? " he said ;
" Yea," answered Thomas, yielding ; and for gold,
As once his Master, Thomas now was sold ;
Who in the merchant's ship to India sped.

And now the barque against the quay they warp,
And as Abbanes ate and drank, his slave
Sang of the Soul—a Galilean stave ;
And lo, a Hebrew virgin brought a harp.
" Daughter of Light," he sang,—the wench's eyes
Large with great love of kin and wonderment—
" Daughter of Light, before whose feet are bent
Kings, and the great of earth, in lowly wise,

Whose robes are woven of flowers from many Springs,—
An odour of bloom comes forth, and carol of birds,
Or ever she breathes or uttereth sighs or words,
Whose sandals kissed make wise the lips of kings:

"Truth sits upon her forehead; thirty and two
Are they who sing her praises; at her call
Seven groomsmen wait, and gird her as a wall;
Likewise before her feet seven virgins strew
Cassia, sweet calamus, myrrh and cinnamon;
She lifts her hand, and lo, in choral dance
Twelve Æons, offspring of the Light, advance,
Crowned by the Bride and Bridegroom, one by one.
Her neck is as a tower, and either breast
Like ivory, and the milk within them Love:
Who eat her banquet hunger shall not move,
Who drink her wine shall know eternal rest."

He sang; and, singing, beasts beside the well
Slew one who smote him, as the Saint foretold,
Saying "A black dog in his teeth shall hold
The hand which smites;" and so the thing befell.
Whereat they marvelled. And the king, who heard,
Cried out "What slave, Abbanes, hast thou brought?"
And he, "O king, a builder wisely taught!"
Wherefore Gundaphoros mused, and stroked his beard:
"'Daughter of Light!'—a goodly song, in sooth!
Singing thou buildest! Build as thou dost sing,
A builder thou and minstrel for the king:
For lo, this day my daughter weds a youth;

"And thou shalt sing what time the groomsmen quit
The bridal chamber and the bashful bride

Steals through the arras to her bridegroom's side :
' Daughter of Light ' sing thou, and hearing it
Wisdom may seal their nuptials, and her Rose
Enwreathe their house porch ; yea, and thou in time
Shalt build their palace that the tree may climb
Walls fit to bear its blossom as it grows."
These things the Lord put in his heart to say,
And Thomas bowed, and sang, and sang anew
Of truth and Christ before those wedded two,
And wisdom blossomed in their hearts that day.

II

Thus spake the king Gundaphoros to his slave :
" Forasmuch as I am fain betimes to see
Mine heirs housed in a palace sumptuously,
Build now, and well, or tarrying build thy grave !
Soon I go hence ; the month is Dius now,
In Xanthicus the bases must be laid."
Said Didymus, " My lord shall be obeyed :
Ere then the palace shall be built, I vow ! "
" Nay," quoth Gundaphoros, " lo, the frost is nigh !
Go to ! thou dost but say an idle thing !
None build in winter." Thomas saith, " O king !
In sun or frost I keep my vow, or die ! "

Then spake he thus—and took a measuring reed—
" Thy windows shall behold the dawning Light,
Thy lucent portals shame the pomp of night :
Southward, to banquet all thy race at need,
Vast granaries will I stablish ; in the north,
Which gazes on the azure hills, I lay
Conduits, that men may see pure fountains play,
And over all thy land the stream go forth."

Whereat Gundaphoros mocked and wagged his head,
Beholding all things ordered as he willed,—
"Thus ere the month Xanthicus wouldst thou build,
Or meet thy death? Then soothly thou art dead!"

So went his journey. And behold the slave
Took all the wealth he left to build his dome,
And went among the poor from home to home,
Crying, "The king is gracious; this he gave
To feed the famished, teach the unlettered poor,
Uplift the orphan, give the sufferer ease,
Make of the winter spring, and heal disease:
In his name draw the bolt of every door!
Let in the sunshine! Cleanse each squalid den!"
So day and night he laboured, so he raised
Asylums for the sick, and hourly praised
The king whose palace is the hearts of men.

Now sped Gundaphoros home, and with him Gad,
The bridegroom's regal sire, to whom he cried
(For now no more he deemeth Thomas lied)
"Come, see a marvel! So we love the lad,
Your son, our daughter's spouse, that we have built
A home for him whereof the world shall ring,
A palace meet to house a deathless king,—
Thanks to a slave who doeth what thou wilt,—
Buildeth in winter, hath a wondrous voice,
Goadeth black hounds to slaughter at his nod:
In sooth a Mage, or else a son of God;—
Come, haste and see!" And going they rejoice;

And seek that place the apostle meted out:
But lo, the sod unturned, the meadows sweet

With grass and golden flowers and children's feet ;
Nor any hammer sounds ; but people shout
Wildly their welcome, and acclaim the king
Bless'd as a God in heaven ; yet he alone,
Seeing no stone-built palace, turns to stone,
Rails, threatens, curses, bids his warriors bring
The traitor fettered in a thorny gyve,—
Nay, on a shield his carcass ! Nay, his head
Eyeless upon a trencher ! Nay, not dead,
For they shall see him flayed and baked alive !

But lo, in that same hour, Gad falleth sick ;
" The slave ! Go call the slave," the people cry,
" The slave gives life, and certes he must die ! "—
" Yea, life to Ghouls, and towers that lack a brick ! "
Gundaphoros thunders ; yet no more forbids,
But, seeing him now past mortal power to save,
Beckons the bride, the bridegroom, and the slave,
Who straightway kneel and kiss his ashen lids,
Weeping ; until at length the Doubter prays :
" Christ, by the spear-wound in thy blessed side !
O Master, patient when thy slave denied :
Do thou, who raised Thyself, our brother raise ! "

The king hath stroked his beard and drunk his wine :
" Now hath the mummer juggled ? Let him bake ! "
His speech is thick and fierce : " Prepare the stake !
Bring knives and faggots : wait the kingly sign,
Then flay him ! " Once again he strokes his beard,
Gazing at Gad, and sees a dead man blush !
His lips are parted ; lo, they quiver ! hush !
" O daughter, speak ! Was it a moan we heard ? "

A moan ! a laugh ! he turns upon his bed ;
His eyes are open, staring at the light ;
He laughs again : 'tis earth ; but day, or night ?
" Sell me thy palace ! " That was all he said.

" Gundaphoros, pause ! " (he sees the whetted knives)
" O pause ! O spare him ! I have seen a thing
Which turns to dross the dowry of a king !
We dote, we maunder, all our mortal lives !
What of our weary getting showeth good ?
Our flaunting palaces, our fawning slaves—
They are but mutes and tombstones on our graves ;
Our wine is bitter with our foemen's blood ;
We strain at others' joys, and snare distress ;
Pride runs a bill, and Anguish pays her debt :
Up ! up ! and snatch thy sandals from the net !
There is naught good but Love and loveliness.

" ' Daughter of Light ! ' sang out a thousand choirs ;
A maiden led me apparelled like the moon
Whose raiment turns our mortal night to noon ;
Eager, I neared the Fount of Fair Desires.
Was it a palace ?—Thou in foolish pride
Lookest for walls of loveless adamant :
These walls have life ; they glow, they thrill, they pant—
Thou feel'st them as a lover feels his bride.
Was it a palace ?—There was warmth above ;
Colours of conches, birds, and on the floor
Roses, and fragrance gushing through the door ;
The walls were music made of human love.

" I craved an entrance : ' Nay,' the maiden said,
' There is a Name which opes the palace door ;

Another crown than thine methinks He bore :
Take off thy crown ; put ashes on thy head ;
The builder seek ' (she smiled) ' or beg of one
Who scorned the house to sell it unto thee ;
Or toil among the sick, and grasp the key ;
Or kneel and learn the Name beside thy son.'
—' I am a king,' I cried, ' no toiling knave !
Utter the price, and certes I will buy ! '
' Thy kingdom,' said the maid ; whereunto I :
' Who is the builder, then ? ' She said, ' The slave.' "

Gad's tale is told. Now gleams the unglutted knife ;
" Spare him ! O spare the slave ! " the people cry ;
They weep, they wail, their clamour cracks the sky ;
Falling, the blade will cleave a nation's life.
But lo, the king's left hand is on his crown,
His right hand beckons : " Bring your captive here !
Loose him, ye dogs," he thunders : loud they cheer !
Before his feet he bids the Saint bow down :
" A well-taught slave in sooth, and cheaply priced !
Name thou thy Master ; I would pay him more."
The Name is named which opes the palace door :
" Take this ! " he said, " I yield my crown to Christ."

I LAID a snare of flowers to net my love:
The lily's scimitar, my passion's flame,
Burnt white within its sheath; the violet wove
Warm veils of perfume o'er the windflower's bed.
Ah! will she know me constant, droop her head,
Pillowed upon my arm, and blush her shame,
Red like my roses when I breathe Love's name?
Wild summer gale, be silent! Make no moan!
My love comes nigh my garden all alone!

The gale sighed low and sank; the lilac wept;
Laburnum cast gold fillets from her crown;
The bees were drowsed; the loud cicala slept;
I heard my heart amid the stillness beat.
Be silent, heart, or thou wilt stay her feet!
She comes! She comes! My pansies kiss her gown!
Her tranquil eyes are angels looking down!
My flowers, my heart, beneath her feet lie prone:
My love hath trod my garden all alone.

This pleasance hath a winepress: I have laid
A snare of grapes, begemmed with morning dews;
Their boughs were heartstrings: lo, my heart arrayed
The fruit with purple and the leaves with green.
Come now, and taste the clusters, O my Queen!
Her white small feet were strong,—ah, strong to bruise!
She trod the winepress, and my blood did ooze!
Come, Death, and see my flowers! My love hath flown;
Soft fall thy feet, and I am all alone.

FOOTSTEPS OF PROSERPINE

"Comites, accedite," dixit,
"Et mecum plenos flore referte sinus."
. . . Panditur interea Diti via.
OVID, *Fasti*, iv. 431, 449.

I

CYCLAMEN

Found among fallen leaves in a Mediterranean grove.

O THE tresses, blown
On the April breeze,
Of the maiden lone
By the trembling seas!
O the vision bright
Of the crimson gown
Where the sunbeams light
On the beech-leaves brown!

Apollo hath builded
A wall of blue;
Its gates all gilded
He rideth through.

On the emerald plain
His minions glance,
Of the Nereids fain
And the Tritons' dance.

As a coral shell
In the cool green sea,—
As a rose by a well,—
So fair is she!
By the shore she waits,
In the grove by the shore,
And looks to the gates
O'er the emerald floor.

O the silvery flakes,
And the mad sweet trill
That the skylark shakes
From his mellow bill!
O the dip of the wings,
And the flash of the spray
That the sea-swallow flings
As he darts away!

By the shore she lingers,
Adown the glade,
And bendeth white fingers
Her brow to shade;
For her dark eyes follow
Yon white-winged barque,
And she heeds not the swallow
And hears not the lark.

O the vision bright
  Where the leaves lie brown,
O the bosom white,
  And the breezy gown !
O the crimson flush,
  And the parting lips,
And the mounting blush,
  And the eyes' eclipse !

Now she heareth the hiss
  Of the keel on the shore,
And, alert for her bliss
  As the lav'rock to soar,
She runneth and winneth
  His bosom to hers,
And the sweet hour beginneth,
  The crown of the years !

Ah, well for the maiden
  Who loveth a god,
Whose heart is love-laden,
  Whose feet are love-shod !
For, through sun-gilded portals,
  He bears her away
To the home of immortals,
  The fountain of day.

But alas for the meadows
  Bereft of the maid,
The light amid shadows,
  The glint of the glade !

In sorrow undying,
  In uttermost grief,
The zephyrs go sighing
  From leaf to leaf.

Yet now, where blown tresses
  Shone gay in the glooms
Of the woodland recesses,
  Sweet Cyclamen blooms:
For the gods, when they blight us
  By stealing our best,
Oft toss to requite us
  Some trifle in jest:

For a hero, a peace;
  Wise laws for a seer;
For the thyrsus of Greece
  The pilum and spear;
A life's recollection
  For joy of an hour;
For woman's perfection—
  A picture—a flower!

II

LITTLE GENTIAN

(*Gentiana Nivalis: blossoming in mountain pastures, only beneath clear skies.*)

"LEAN, little mother, o'er my bed;
And do not let your lashes fall;
I think, when God put in your head
Those shining eyes, he smiled, and said:
'Here's water from the lakes of heaven:
In case my child in pain should call
For some cool drink, let this be given.'
And now I have no joy at all,
Save when the trouble leaves your brow,
Or in blue skies
I see God's eyes:
In other times you taught me how:
So when your eyes no longer shine
Then I close mine.

"Why have you grown so wan? and why,
Though now my pain is less, do you,
When I feign sleeping, often sigh?
I know that fellow spoke a lie.

God does not, as our usher, strike
Poor boys, and help the rich ones through.
Yet when I told that boy I like,
Your eyes were large, and bright, and blue,
One, knowing us, I know not how,
Turned, sneered, and said
'She'll soon be dead.'
That's why I cried all night; and now,
When your eyes shut, and cease to shine,
Then I close mine.

"I wish you had not stitched, and wrought
All night to have me tutored well;
I do not learn the half I ought:
'A mere small fool' I'm named; and thought,
I know not why, beneath the rest.
Your cheeks were far too fair to sell
To have me taught and smartly drest:
But all these things I could not tell:
At nine you're such a child, you see;
It's different when
You're nearly ten;
And you had none but only me.
Yet if your bright eyes will but shine
I'll laugh with mine!

"How pale you are! and chill as snow!
A few more coals were such a prize!
You're thinking of that man, I know,
Who made you wretched years ago—
The man now rich, who took your gold:
You must not, dear; it is not wise:

It always makes you wan and cold.
Mother! . . . I'm frightened! Move your eyes!"
He kissed her lips, and prayed in vain
For one more smile;
Now sobbed awhile;
Till, told dead eyes ope not again,
He stayed to know if that were true,
Then closed his too.

And when they laid them 'neath the sod
The rich folk said, "We know her past:
How sad! Yet here we see His rod."
Then went their several ways, and trod
On other lives. But where they lay,
In nameless graves, amid the vast
Mute hills, whose brows the breaking day
First kisses, lo, a seed was cast,
Whence sprang beneath the darkling firs,
Or haply grew
In sign Love knew,
A flower, stained like his eyes and hers;
And when Love seals Her eyes of blue
This flower shuts too.

III

SOLDANELLA

(*The flower of this name, Soldanella Alpina, first herald of Spring in the high alps, makes way through the snow as if by its own warmth.*)

THE HERMIT OF THE WOOD. SOLDANELLA.

HERMIT

WHAT wilt thou with me, maiden? Little wins
In amorous dalliance or delicious sins
Frail womankind of me, a ruined tower
Wind-rifted, no warm habitable bower;
A moment of accumulated woes
Made monumental; one whom earth in throes
Raised as a mountain, whose devoted front,
A nation's bulwark, bore the impact and brunt
Of all the blasts and buffetings of Fate;
For such beholdest thou; and that ingrate,
The nation, battening on my toil's repast,
Whom I preserved, behold; for me they cast,
Exiled, to this bleak vestibule of death.

SOLDANELLA

I love the kiss of Boreas ; his rude breath,
Cold as my lost beloved's, wins my blood
To blushes, and I foot the frozen wood
To gather fuel, and (for gamesome Spring
Tarries) to pasture these thy goats, and bring
Meal for thy bakehouse, trip the happy vale
Each sunrise, and the frore sweet air inhale.

HERMIT

Truly in vigils oft mine eyes have praised,
Most rathe of roses, her whose kirtle, raised
About the dimpled knee, bears o'er the snow
The faggots wherewithal my rafters glow ;
Yea, praised with clinging glances, yet till now
Speechless these nine weeks, careful of my vow
No more with man or maiden to converse ;
Which I but break to bid thee fly my curse,
And brave no more a couchant lion's cage.

SOLDANELLA

Nay, but I fly not, nor the leonine rage
Fear, though it plough deep furrows in my heart ;
For reft of me thy soul would too depart
Its rugged habitation ; since thy hand,
Maugre its might, doth little understand
To feed thy lips, O Hermit of the wood !

HERMIT

Well mayst thou mock the might that once subdued
A world, but now droops impotent to tame
One virgin ! Yet if no voluptuous aim

Hath sped thee here, but thou fall immolate
By rigour of Love as I by wrath of Fate
On this cold altar of ashen solitude,
Still, though I may not curse thee, it is good
Thou shouldst depart, and in yon happier plain,
If there he dwell, seek thy beloved again,
Or, if Death bind him, sojourn by his tomb.

SOLDANELLA

He dwells not yonder, nor was death his doom ;
Neither will I repair to seek him now ;
Yet should he seek me, and his love avow,
Him loving through the loveless world I follow.

HERMIT

Stranger, thou lovest not ! As well the swallow
Shall linger all the winter in the north
As thou beneath my frown, who mayst go forth
Into the summer of thy leman's smile.
Natheless, if such vain colloquy beguile
A girl's heart, somewhat of thy lover tell.

SOLDANELLA

When last he smiled on me, my love did dwell
Where the three lions ward the tranquil wave.

HERMIT

Ah ! Was he then of those base folk who drave
The great Duke into exile ?

SOLDANELLA

Yea, for lo,
My hero was the doge's fellest foe.

HERMIT

Then name no more the recreant knave to me.

SOLDANELLA

O peaceful hermit, wherefore not to thee ?

HERMIT

Knowest thou, wanton, whom thou dost behold ? . . .
I am the Duke !

SOLDANELLA

I know, and yet am bold,—
The woman's way,—aware the proudest king
Discrowned is but a fangless, futile thing :
The nations leagued against him—Thirst,
Hunger, and Cold ; and of his foes the worst—
Those factions in his narrowed government,
Pride, his old paramour, and Malcontent,
The new one, who debar him from domains
Of passionate pleasance, towers, and shining plains,
And all Love's heritage : O happier far
These than the realms he lost ! For while one star
Glows in eve's brow, while yet new dawns array
The ebon arch of night with azure day,
While Earth, mailed sleeper, wakes at kiss of Spring
With laugh of leafy brake and whirr of wing,
To blush of bloom and harvest,—all Love's heirs
Are princes, and the mortal who despairs
Builds his own dungeon and secretes the key.

HERMIT

So say ye, glib-mouthed, mocking Vanity ?
Beware ! For lo, the madness comes apace !
Walled round with silence, long I fought disgrace,
But in the deadly grapple now grow weak.
Speech hast thou wrenched from me : shall I not wreak
On thee eternal silence ? What art thou ?
A glittering snake coiled round an April bough,
Her venom masked with fragrance ! Haply he
Thou braggest of suborned thee treacherously
To watch, and in good time betray his foe.

SOLDANELLA

Fiercely thou risest ; and the fitful glow
Flung from the embers clothes thy shape in dread.
So once an eagle in a flame of red,—
Shot from the savage dying eyes of day,—
Swooped, and a small warm trembling bird, his prey,
Fell in my lap for succour. Such am I ;
But such a lap beneath my soul doth lie
Odorous, the lap of Love : so, Eagle, strike !
I fear thee not. Thy frown and smile alike
My roots sustain. O thou Implacable,
Think not to affray me ! I will serve thee still !

HERMIT

Truly thy hardihood is wondrous great ;
Nor less thy vision, keen to penetrate
That iron crust of wrongs which binds the world,
And see beneath the broad soft wings unfurled
Old fables prate of. As for me, I trace
In Fate's cold eyes, clenched teeth, and cruel face,

No smile. But, if thou art forsooth so wise,
Speak ! Tell what joy a man shall have who dies
Biting, for fruit of all good labours done,
Dust and the venom spat by each vile one
He lived to serve ? This, maiden Wisdom, say,
And thou by grace of me shalt live—one day !

SOLDANELLA

Such joy he hath, O Hermit, as the lark,
Who from the clod mounts up, nor waits to mark
What praise he wins, but to the great Sun's call
Answers like dew ; for though unthanked he fall
Midway, yet doubtless on his life's brave song
His soul shall mount to Heav'n, and all his wrong
Rest like a cloud beneath : such joy he hath !

HERMIT

Thou liest, girl ! Not so, but as the bath
God takes who laves Himself in human woe
His joy is ; and as God with one fierce blow
Hath paid my life's hard service, thus I pay
Thee who served me ; avenging in one day
On God's best work the wrong it was His joy
To lay on me, as ill-used slaves destroy
Their tyrants' treasure ; then, wrapt round with Hate,
In black clouds charioted, the ebon gate
My blasted soul shall pass,—by thee in death
Dove-convoyed to that kingdom where each breath
Is righteous hate of God's unrighteousness :
So will I slay thee, and, in slaying, bless,
Not curse thee.

SOLDANELLA

Lost! O king! My king! All lost!
Shall dews of love quench madness? Nay! Love's cost
Wins only tears! Ah, like a swift gazelle,
Soft Love upleapeth, deeming all is well;
Fool! Fate hath fostered thee in life's fair bounds,
As deer in parks, to flesh the Hunter's hounds!
Woe numbed my lord, but "Love's great warmth," I said,
"Like living blood in frozen limbs, thought dead,
Stirs in his soul, and though his lips but move
To utter groans, yet is it well; for love
Conquers!" And so I toyed with two-edged speech
To rouse him, and I said "He shall beseech
The love I die to lavish." Hapless maid!
In longed-for sport of love, all unafraid,
I cried, "Pursue!" But lo, his lip's award
Followed not: only madness, and a sword!

HERMIT

Of me thou pratest now. Afraid to die,
This other love thou wouldst unshamed deny?
Or shall a maid's lust caper like a mob's
From one lord to the next, and cheers or sobs
Dance wanton in the wake?

SOLDANELLA

O noble Duke,
Mock not in this last morning, nor rebuke
The love that called thee noblest son of Earth!
To thee my soul gave all her virgin worth,
Thee only, finding else no paragon
With that fair image of a man which shone
Apparelled in all my dreams with haze of gold. . . .

HERMIT

Oho! Ye merry gods, who love to mould
Your lies of woman's flesh and make them fair,
Hearken! In Venice dwells her love, and there
Stood foremost of my foes: but me she loved,
Me only!

SOLDANELLA

Truly, since my heart approved
The Duke's foe in the Duke. For I am she
He smiled on, when amid the howling sea
Of those who cried, "The war wins Venice wealth!"
I heard him answer, "Never came of stealth
True weal, nor shall the state I bled for fight
To wrench a prize from Liberty and Right,
Nor Venice crave more weal than to be Just!"
Yea, I am that unknown who thereat thrust
Her painful way through all the yelping press,
And kissed and clasped thy feet in wild caress,
Until men trampled her, and from a swoon
She woke to find thee exiled; whom full soon
She followed hither, and unloved, forlorn,
Have tended since. . . . Alack that I was born!

HERMIT

Thy tale is wondrous, stranger! Who art thou
To set white sail and weak unweathered prow
Abreast the deep in search of beacons bright,—
Souls of just men to anchor by, despite
The storms which gird at Justice?

SOLDANELLA

Ask me not,
But strike, O madman! Let not sorrow blot

Love's sunlight ; if the earth be dark, then death
Is surely bright. Heed not my smock : beneath
Throbbeth no craven heart. O sword, my bliss !
I'll dream thou art my hero's longed-for kiss !

HERMIT

Breast of a woman ! How the ruthless sword
Falters before that hallowed ivory ward !

SOLDANELLA

Jesu ! The eagle hath a ring-dove's voice !

HERMIT

The mist rolls back ! O heart, be glad ! Rejoice !
This stranger, strange no more, but mate of me,
Sweet fearless fellow of my lone destiny,
Who fronts all ill below and all above,
And lives or dies for that sole good of love,
This slave shall grow my sovereign, I her slave !
There is no Phlegethon, no gulf, no grave,
So dread as that mad height man climbs in pride
Whence no peak higher shows !—Self-deified
By sense of virtue sterner than his peers',
His worship weds its shadow, and uprears
A brood of sallow doubts, and sick disdains,
Which torture, madden, goad him, till his pains
Close in the chasm despair ! Pray heav'n it grant
Ever thy feet a hill, thy heart a want,
Thy soul a soul more noble to revere !

SOLDANELLA

Praised be the saints, and Love the vanquisher !
The Furies fly ! He falls upon my breast !

HERMIT

I said, " This summer fly is like the rest :
Death's cloak will brush the silver from her wings ! "
Wherefore I conjured Death, and lo, he flings
No veil on her ; but like a star she glows
At eve's first kiss ; and, as the shadows close
About her path, her beauties brightlier shine !

SOLDANELLA

O golden hour ! This king of earth is mine !

HERMIT

No king but thrall of thee ! For I have said,
" Men have no righteousness ; their days are sped
Pursuing lusts and trampling each his kind.
God is less just ; His vasty mill doth grind
Diamonds with dross ; He guerdons wrong with weal,
And lashes noble souls, refined to feel
The ruthless scourge : God, man and beast alike,—
Yea beasts, who howling o'er their victims strike
The shuddering keynote of the spheral song,—
Clothed round in ravening cruelty and wrong,
Jibe with wry mouths at Justice ; I alone
Smote with my sword to kindle from a stone
The flame of Right—and snapt the sword in twain."
Thus did I musing, maddened, long remain
Lonely above the world, an evil god
Proclaiming all things evil,—sky and sod.
My Flower hath sprung, and clod and cloud are good.
Her star athwart Time's dark tumultuous brood
Beams, an Aurora calming tumbled seas
Whereon my soul was tossed, and found no ease

Until this hour; but, ever urged alone
With stress of loveless Duty, still did groan;
Like these rock solitudes with ice encased:
Rigid, austere, and desolate, a waste
Populous with moaning winds and massy clouds:
Comfortless comrades, nodding ghostly shrouds,
Hurtling in dismal vales, where pines are torn,
And snow gales blind the blinking eyes of morn:
A fruitless waste, where never grass or wheat
Sang, or one blossom kissed the traveller's feet.

SOLDANELLA

Nay, for flowers peep already through the snow:
I gathered these to-day: where'er they blow
Yon ermine cloak about the mountain's breast,
Pierced with their warmth, reveals the mossy vest
Above the mighty heart. I pray thee speak
No ill of this dear land of rock and peak!
These pigmy prophet-flowers sang in mine ear:
"Not winter evermore,—not all the year
Ice pendants on the pines, black, gaunt, and bowed
With flaky manna kneaded by bluff cloud
And boisterous hurricane,—not lintels crost
With white mark of the pestilence of frost,—
Not in the passes eddying drifts and wind
To scourge the temples and the eyesight blind,—
Not clogged and muffled feet and dole of heart,
But soon the warm sun-solace, and a start,
Momently sweet, of myriad panting things,
Chimes of sweet shaken bells and blossomings
The insects hear, and drowsed with odours drone
Vagrant, or swayed on grasses, tossed and blown

Beneath the sailing clouds. . . ." Ah, faint and low,
Hear we not now Spring's chariot o'er the snow?
Hark to the whirling wheels and galloping feet!
She comes! She comes! The savage blasts retreat.

HERMIT

I hear the gush and hurry of many rills
Born of the melting snow.

SOLDANELLA

The assembled hills
Find voice with thee: their snowfields melt and brim
A million channels.

HERMIT

Oh, these eyes were dim!
Cold Earth I saw, not Loveliness the blossom.
Now let me clasp mine April to my bosom!
Closer! ah, closer!

SOLDANELLA

Stay! My flowers are there!
Fie! would he crush you, little flowers, nor spare
One frail fringed tunic?—Look how every bell
Droops!

HERMIT

Like her lashes: oft I marked them well.
Tears clung there; brave she looked, though flushed and shamed,—
But what are these in shepherd language named?

SOLDANELLA

I know not.

HERMIT

Tell me thy own name, maiden, then.

SOLDANELLA

They call me Soldanella.

HERMIT

So let men
Name these, for hither they have climbed to bloom
Beneath the frowning summit's bastioned gloom,
And prank with emerald lawns the winter snow;
As thou didst climb, and, shadowed by my woe,
Melt my cold armour, thaw my blank despair,
And fill the space with warmth and fragrant air.
For life were naught but one bleak mountain range,
Sunless and lashed with wild tempestuous change,
Whose pinnacles interrogate a sky
Thunderous with dark oracular reply;
Nor in man's soul had there been any lake
To glass the overarching heavens, which ache
With infinite tenderness, nor any hope
In lack of that one clue whereby we grope,
That gleam in darkness of the light above,
That snow environed blossom, woman's love.

IV

SAINT VERONICA

(*Veronica Chamædrys : the common Speedwell.*)

VERONICA, Speedwell, eyelet of the hedge,
Maiden whose mantle print is of the sky,
Yon rebel lover, lightly passing by,
Recked not you flung your raiment for a pledge
That Love shall yet prevail ; nor knew he trod—
Blue heaven above him, drops of heaven below—
Miniatures Mother Earth would fain bestow,
Warm from her breast, of that one smile of God ;
Types of that blue entablature above
The pillars of this desecrated fane ;
Tears out of heaven to ease Prometheus' pain ;
Circlets of azure woven in looms of Love.

But I, my Speedwell,—seeing your tiny plaid
Wrought with like woof and legend,—have I missed
The meaning of that ancient herbalist
Who named you from the Galilean maid ?
Hers was the print of Him whose countenance
Mirrored the azure—Him who, first of men,
Dared name the Power that flings the dice of pain
Prometheus' judge and lord of Fate and Chance,

" Father ! "—O marvel !—Him who set at naught
Rome, at whose frontier beat a baffled world,
Who reared his cross above her eagles furled,
Who conquered all her legions with a Thought !

To Him the fainting maiden's feet were led :
She scarce came nigh Him 'mid the adoring press,
Touched but his raiment, moaned her long distress :
" Woman, thy faith hath made thee whole," He said.
—Once more they throng, but curse the healer now :
His soul, a shining heaven, with hell at bay,
Cries, " Lord, forgive ! they know not what they say ! "
The woman weeps to see his sanguined brow.
He bears his cross : they deem the thing a play.
Blinded, He staggers ; blood obscures his sight.
They spit, they goad Him : who shall help his plight ?
Who come betwixt the wolves' teeth and the prey ?

Helpless at last He falls, the brow unstanched ;
They howl their joy, they froth their venomed hate :
No voice, no visage seems compassionate.
None ? Nay, behold ! A woman, tearful, blanched,
Braves the ranked cohorts, breaks the serried line,
Lays her white kerchief on his bleeding face,
Dries, cools his brow, revives Him with the grace
Of woman's love for which the godlike pine.
Speechless He thanks her, mute a promise makes ;
She only knows his look the deed approves,—
Jesus despairs not while one woman loves :
He passes glad ; not now his God forsakes.

She with the many mingles, weeping sore,
Deaf to the hooting crowd, the obscene jest,

Clasping the kerchief closely to her breast,
Her keepsake when the Master is no more.
—No more? Alas, O blue soft turtle dove!
O crested lark, whose songs no longer wake
The Master dreaming by Capernaum's lake,
Dreaming of faith and brotherhood and love!
O sacrificial Bird imbrued with gore,
Who singest in the human jackal's den
Of heavenly kingdoms in the hearts of men,
Is this thy song's end? Wilt thou sing no more?

Back to Capernaum, past the Vale of Tears,
The kerchief in her breast to assuage her woes;
Past Shiloh, Bethel, back the maiden goes:
An impress on the wimple fold appears!
Faint like a film of smoke at first, the lines
Watered with weeping, ever wax more bold;
Until at length, O wondrous to be told!
Forth from the weft the face of Jesus shines!
The portrait breathes; the soul of Christ is there,
Blown on the fabric, as when masters limn;
She gazes long, her heart communes with Him:
Radiant He looks, as last He looked on her.

She reads his promise, knows her deed's reward:
"Take to thy bosom this my blood, and lo,
Within thy breast my lineaments shall grow."
She reads his look, and knows her living Lord.
So, gazing ever, dragged at last to Rome,
Her country fallen, her friends the tyrant's prey,
She healed an emperor with the weft, they say:
Then, homeless, she who succoured Christ, went home.—

So runs the tale. Yet still the tyrants wait
  Pride-sick, unhealed; and still beneath their rod
  Men bleed unholpen by the face of God,—
By Love aggrieved, or Love compassionate.

Unhealed we wait, my Speedwell, whom they name
  Veronica, namesake of the woman blest
  With Love's true image; (Speedwell, have I guessed
Your title's meaning?)—yet while blossoms fall,
And strew in spring the narrow lanes of life
  With replicas of Love's true azure tinct,
  Still may we hope our mortal lives are linked
Across this stubble waste of woe and strife,
These steeps which hourly hear an Orpheus wail,
  These rocks resounding with Prometheus' groan,
  To some great kindly life which moulds our own,
  By whom our ills are weighed, our sorrows known,
Who rules that good shall prosper, evil fail,
Life conquer Death, and Love at last prevail.

V

VIOLET

SMALL fragrant print of April's feet ;
Dream in the dewy grass, more sweet
Than virgin visions mavis weaves
At dawn beneath the sunlit eaves,
Secret as passion unconfest,
Within the dreaming maiden's breast,
Tinct with her veins' delicious hue,
And, like her lashes, touched with dew :
Violet,—kneeling near your shrine,
Starred with the golden celandine,
Like sunflakes on a coverlet
Which golden dreams of love beget,—
I, feeling past your petal's hem
Along your cool and slender stem,
Pluck your unravished bloom betimes,
And lay it here among my rhymes.

VI

SPRING DELAYED

O WHY do you tarry so long, Spring?
The almond has budded and blown;
The lark will grow tired of her song, Spring,
The yaffel laugh turn to a moan.

The fans of the alders unfurl, Spring;
The osiers grow silky and sleek,—
More gold than the locks of a girl, Spring,
More soft than the down on her cheek.

They wither and droop while you linger;
The marybuds open and close;
The frost, with the touch of his finger,
Has numbed the red lips of the rose.

Come waft o'er the waves of our seas, Spring!
We sigh for the sound of your feet!
Come couch in our buttercup leas, Spring!
No glades in the world are so sweet,

No meadows so green in the South, Spring!
Yet why are you lingering there?
The bloom and the laugh on your mouth, Spring,
The sun in the threads of your hair.

You tarry, and Winter lies whining,
A mendicant, naked and gray,
In dead leaves and snow-drifts reclining,
Gaunt, palsied, and plashed with the clay;

And only your coming delivers
Our porch from the curse of the crone:
You enter, he mumbles and shivers,
And stretches lank limbs, and is gone!

And kneedeep in kingcup and clover
We wander, and dream, while you sing
The song of a bride to her lover:
For what but a bride are you, Spring?—

A wench in warm virginal vesture,
A blush in a shimmer of blonde,
Light-footed, and lissom of gesture,
Swan-bosomed, capricious, and fond:

Nay, sister of youth and of strife, Spring!
The spirit that lurks in the clod
Of Love and of Beauty and Life, Spring!
The breath and the raiment of God!

VII

SPRING ARRIVED

We will carol all the day
In the coming of the May ;
For the Winter goeth by
With a sorry churlish sigh,
And the Springtide cometh in
With a very merry din
Of the birdlets in the groves—
Little gossips, with their loves ;
" O the merry, merry Spring ! "
All those feathered fellows sing :
Now they hover on the wing,
Now on budding branches swing,
Now the dewbells from their breasts
Shake, and hie them to their nests.
Then when morning breaks again,
Clouds recumbent on the plain
Lift, and loiter by confines
Of the black embattled pines ;
And the Sun-god from his car
Hurls his golden arrows far :
Every ray, a Cupid's dart,
Shall transfix a flow'ret's heart ;

And ere many days are sped
All those faery people wed.
Foremost in the jolly rout
Come the giants, tall and stout,
One by one in bridal march,
Chestnut, sycamore, and larch,
Lime and elm, and silver birch,
Brawny beech left in the lurch.
Last, those ancient sturdy folk,
Curvèd ash and crookèd oak :
Who, in vernal robes of green,
Join the merry marriage scene.
Now through fields and wildernesses
See, in countless bridal dresses,
Every flower at Hymen's feast,
From the greatest to the least :
Pimpernels, and black-eyed poppies,
Primrose peeping from the coppice,
Arum cowled—a one-eyed Phorkys,
Glossy kingcup, mottled orchis,
Thistles—amazons in armour,
Sabred foe of thrifty farmer,
Cowslip coy, majestic mullein,
Mallow mutinous and sullen,
Purple loosestrife minaretted,
Soft forget-me-not the petted,
And her comely jealous sister
Spit-fire bugloss (no one kist her),
All ablush with poet's praises
Pretty commoners the daisies,
Madcap roses—ruddy, vagrant,
Iris lappeted, and fragrant
Thyme, and mint, and marshland myrtle,—

Every flower that dons a kirtle.
  Little pipers, jocund all,
Pipe your loudest madrigal,
Bleating lambs and lowing cattle,
Streams and freshets, join your prattle,
Plaint of wind and surge of sea
Chime exultant symphony ;
For beneath the sapphire span,
Flaming heralds in the van,
Lo, the great high priest rides in,
And the festal hours begin.
" O the merry, merry Spring ! "
Loud the choir is carolling ;
While those capuchins the bees,
Humming drowsy liturgies,
Bear the bridegrooms' wedding pledges
To their fellows in the hedges.
Gold, and cherished, are their dowers,
All those married faery flowers ;
Who, ere Autumn leaves grow sere,
Ere the crisp ice coats the mere,
Ere the soil with frost is bound,—
Sow a new Spring in the ground.
  Cometh now the final wonder :
Flash of lightning, peal of thunder !
Through an arch of colours blended,
O'er the dewy earth suspended
In a shower of hailstone rice
Goes the pageant in a trice.

How shall I deck thee, dearest ?—Shall I twine
  This coralled bryony wreath about thy brow ?
  And for thy girdle pluck this pendent bough
Of caprifole, or yon pink eglantine ?
When dawn among the roses first did shine,
  One rose looked nearly fair enough, I vow,
  To blush amid thy bosom's snow : but now
No floweret's blush seems fit to mate with thine.

Yet if those fade, beloved, behold I bear
  Some weeds which grew to blossom at thy kiss :
This tendrilled wreath of ever watchful care,
  This chaplet of my changeless trust, and this
Red amaranthine rose of Love to wear
  And blend immortal fragrance with our bliss.

ST. CAMPION AND THE MAID OF WICKLOW

A HIGHLAND glen and one white cottage there :
He watched it from the hills, and when the sun
Sank, and the rocks' recumbent majesty
Rolled in dark billows to the distant sea,
Dropping toward the vale he knew that one
Walked in the fragrant dusk divinely fair,
His soul's white wonder for eternity.

Well shapen, like a goddess, where the brook
Sang in the twilight, silently she moved ;
The wild flowers sleeping on the mountain side,
And that wan lake the Titan's slumbering bride
Loved her, and he too looked on her and loved :
Oh, and her deep eyes answered him that look !
'Twere well if in that rapture he had died !

They spoke ; she gave him water from the stream :
" Drink ! you are thirsty climbing all the day ! "
Her white hands drew the wave and filled the bowl ;
He drank, and thought Heaven dropped an aureole
Upon her brow, and all the girl's array
Shone like the Holy Virgin's : so his dream
Apparelled her, and so within his soul

This virgin bore the Christ. Now fifteen years
His feet clomb other rocks, and grew full sore,
But stumbled not nor often went astray;
For that one draught upheld him all the way.
Ah, when he ranged the lonely hills no more,
But blindly groped to cross the glen of tears
I wonder, did she touch his lips and say,
"Drink! you are thirsty, climbing all the day."

TO ALISON

All ghouls and ghosts shall Science lay? Not ours!
Time is our Spectre-king. By bog and boulder
He drives his bleating flock, once rosy hours,
And still he shuffles on, and we wax older.

Alison, near those freshets of your smiles
Bloom gold-winged iris, meadow-sweet like foam,
And pansies shy amid the Enchanted Isles
Where no ghost walks, no rueful phantoms roam.

A white bird flutes beside that singing river:
Hark to its notes! Be glad, be brave, obey them!
The gay hearts and the true are fair for ever;
Their ghosts turn flowers; like angels they array them.

THE WRECK OF THE "STELLA"

EASTER EVE, 1899

"Tu regere imperio populos, Romane, memento."—VIRGIL.
"The kingdom of God is within you."—CHRIST.

EASTER comes like the gleam of a dawn that delivers the slave,
The drudge of the mill that grinds for the riches of ultimate Rome,
And sheds its light on the desk, and bids him arise from the grave
To a glimpse of the sailing cloud and the sea in a gallop of foam,
Round an isle where the daffodils droop, and dream of the blue of the wave,
And the cormorants plunge and float, plumed with a mermaid's comb.

But twice in the toilsome year, twice only the golden chance
To inhale the scent of the brine, where the bells of the foam are adrift,
To watch the frolic of waves, the whirl and the bacchanal dance,
From rocks aflame with the gorse, ablush with the pink of the thrift:
But twice in the toilsome year, sea-begotten, the golden chance,
The gap in the gloom of our days, and the glow of the sun in the rift.

Our mother, the ocean calls; we sail, and the wife to her man
Clings, and she whispers, "Beloved, for us together alone
A honeymoon comes at last, like the days when our love began;"
And feels for his hand and thrills, as it closes upon her own:
For throbbing and warm are our hearts, though the days of our life are a span,
The rocks lie out in the deep, the wind is a weariful moan,

And the cold waves wash at the keel and we sail to the sound of a sob;
For the witch of the fog sits perched, and brews her kettle, and peers
O'er the oily plain of the sea, and the steam rolls off from the hob,
And the moan is a babble and laugh as the fog-witch listens and hears
The throb of the fated ship, whose burden is hearts that throb,
And she knows that the brine of the sea will swallow the salt of their tears.

But twice in the toilsome year, twice only the joy betides
That beats in our hearts to-day, as the ship ploughs on through the gloom,
Mightily furrows the flood, and hurls from her flanks as she rides
Foam eddies. . . . But see! On the port! What ominous fastnesses loom?
A shout! A crash! We have struck! The Casquets are ripping our sides!
Thrice shudders the monster, and reels, a live thing smitten with doom.

Her ribs are cracking and ground by the old leviathan's teeth,
Sucked in by the lips of the sea whose laughter we sought like balm ;
Yet we who are palpitant, frail, our lives sustained on a breath,
Whose pity and passion and praise sob out like the sound of a psalm,—
We behold around us the flood, the lithe snake hungry for death,
We possess our spirits in peace, we clasp our hands and are calm.

Now hail and farewell unto him who heard from the vessel a groan :
" My daughter ! she only is left ! "—a voice from the fountain of tears,
Who sprang from the succouring boat, gave place to a maiden unknown,
Then sank, as a star on a hill gleams golden and then disappears :
To him is no dirge and no tomb, no name engraven on stone,
But the tomb and the dirge of the deep for a grandeur more than the spheres.

To her, too, hail and farewell, whom the strangling terror, the grave
Unmasked, as in daytime the moon through a cavern of darkness will shine :
A hundred took life from her hands, yet one there was left to save :
She drew the belt from her breast : " A mightier Saviour is mine :
Take this ; " then knelt on the deck, and kneeling sank in the wave :
Sweet saint, O hail and farewell ! We too would kneel at your shrine.

But the fog-witch broods on the deep; and Doubt by the altar of life:
"The hearts of your brave are quenched,—hissed out in the sea like a spark:
A moan, a gurgle, a calm; nor ever a sign of their strife;
A cry gone up to the heavens, and none in the heavens to hark;
But woe for the loved ye have left, an ache in the breast of the wife,
The light of the honeymoon gone, and evermore infinite dark."

* * * * * * *

A nightingale took her love, more sweet than the chiming of bells,
Into her throat and sang,—and the sea drew murmurous breath,—
A song that gave faith unto fear, and hope to the wild farewells,
A fragrance flung to the night, a chant of the victor's wreath:
"O rest in the Lord!" she sang, and to meadows of asphodels
The dying floated in dreams, buoyed up by an Arm beneath.

So Easter dawned on the sea, and the day of the toiler was sped:
Seeking for sunlight and joy he fell upon silence and rest;
He wove dream-garlands of flowers: they turned to thorns on his head;
Our mother, the ocean, called: he came and was slain on her breast.
But a song rose up on the waves, and a light on the land was shed,
That shone and sang from the soul of the victor Isles of the West:

Yea, hearken all nations unborn, all peoples and æons of Time !
We Britons make boast we are great, but not by the lands we control,
Though they be the third of the Earth ; but for this : that no ocean or clime
But has witnessed us calm in a wreck, self-effacing and fearless, and whole,
First succouring women and young : yea in this is the Briton sublime ;
For great is the empire of Earth, more great the command of the soul.

TO FLORA'S LILY

Maid of the mystic kirtle splashed with gold,
  Heavy with scent, scriptured with starry rune,
  You throbbed to life as wells a wonder tune,
A tale of things no man on earth hath told.

White silent wonder, nay are you indeed
  A song of souls hid in the world's arcane [21]
  Whence through our soil they pour the golden strain,
And flute their rapture through the flowering reed?

Nay, while we pluck their pæans from our sod,
  Do ours sow theirs with rose and galingale?
  O dullard clay, this music breaks the veil,
Chanting the great antiphone of God!

A BALLAD OF SIR KAY

[*To E. D. H.*]

PART I

What, ho?
Kay the Seneschal,
Fare ye forth in the woods alone?
Yea, 'sooth,
And who shall hinder me?
Hardier Knight, by the Rood, there is none!

Tangled thorn, and the gliding snake,
And the whistle of owls he liketh not,
Nor the glimmer of eyes in the ashen brake,
Nor the hooves of tuskèd boars, God wot!

Wit ye well
A giant is bellowing!
Take to thy heels thou brave Sir Kay!
Ride! Hide!
Belike he is following:
Knights are his caudle, and fattened to flay.

Eftsoons the woeful echoes die,—
The birds are merry again, I ween:
Braver Knight there is none than I:
Creep on thy belly the boughs between.

Hush ! Ho !
Logrin is lying there,—
Logrin the giant, shaggy of head :
King's son
Lohot beside him :
Which is the sleeper ? Which is the dead ?

Creep and crawl, a blade in thy teeth,—
Reach ye an arm, and sever a neck.
Doughtily done !—Now delve in the heath :
Bury a body, and no man shall reck.

Hack thy shield,
Gallop to Camelot,
Brag of the buffets ye got in the fray ;
Look ye, Knights,
Tied to my saddle bow
Head of the giant, slain by Sir Kay !

PART II

King Arthur sits at his table round,
A year and a day hath passed and gone,
And Kay the Seneschal, still renowned,
A second marvellous deed hath done :

Cometh a maiden, and in her hand
A coffer, carven of gold ywis :
—O King, I have travelled many lands,
But never a Knight may open this !

Stand forth, Sir Lancelot, quoth the King :
Thou are full hardy and deft withal ;
Right craftily shalt thou do this thing.
—But, alack, it might not so befall.

Then followeth many a cunning elf,—
Galahad, Bors and wight Gawain ;
And last of them all the King himself :
Nor ever the lid might open amain.

Then spake the lady : The saying is true
" A mettlesome carle is he that shall come
To open the coffer," for lo he slew
The hardiest knight in Christendom !

Quoth Arthur, Let call the brave Sir Kay :
A coffer of gold for a giant's head,
In sooth were a guerdon meet to pay :—
And the Seneschal nought thereto gainsaid.

Shout, Ho !
Kay the Seneschal,
Kay who Logrin the giant bestrid,—
Kay hath taken it,
Kay hath conquered it,
Kay hath opened the golden lid !

Grammercy, Knight,—King Arthur cried,—
'Tis mickle fame that deed shall win !
—The coffer hath gotten a scroll inside,
And the grimly head of a knight therein !

What, Ho !
Read ye the writing there !
" I AM SIR LOHOT : FOULLY I BLEED :
SLAIN ASLEEP :
LYING ON LOGRIN :
WHO OPENS THE COFFER OWNS TO THE DEED."

The first they saw of the bold Sir Kay
Was a smile and an orgulous port ;
The last they saw of the knight that day
Was his heels as he fled the court.

* * * * * * *

Sing, Ho !
The story is told !
Rascals may thrive for a year and a day :
Shout, Ho !
In their coffers of gold
Are the head of a corpse and the heels of Sir Kay.

CHILDREN'S SONG

Juveniles. Is it snow on the hedges ?
O nay, and O nay !
But the hawthorn is dropping
Its garlands of May.
The frosts are all banished,
The winter days vanished,—
And father's come home again :
Hip-hip-hurray !

Omnes. Father's come home again, etc.

Adolescentes. Oh, we'll wade in the leas
Where the arrow-winged swallow
In shade of the trees
Goes darting, and follow
The butterflies gleaming
Like bloom from the cherry,—
With ribbons all streaming,—
For life is so merry !

Juveniles. Is it gold on the meadows ?
O nay, and O nay !
But the buttercups glitter,
And butterflies play.

The merle's at his 'cello,
The lark's a mad fellow,
And father's come home again,—
Hip-hip-hurray !

Omnes. Father's come home again, etc.

Adolescentes. In the meadows we'll lie
Where the grass is in billows,
And hark to the sigh
Of the wind in the willows :
The sun flashes low.
And ah ! sweet is the clover,
And sorrel's aglow
Like the dream of a lover.

Juveniles. Is it golden rain falling ?
O nay, and O nay !
But the elm and the apple
Are tossing their spray.
The nightingale bubbles ;
Away with all troubles,
For father's come home again,
Hip-hip-hurray !

Omnes. Father's come home again, etc.

HYMN FOR THE HEALING OF STRIFE

PEACE DAY, SOUTH AFRICA, 1902

Heroes of Hampden's race, and ye
The brave of Artevelde's blood,
Twin nations of the Northern sea,
Come bind the bonds of brotherhood !

O long we fought the feud of kin :
Shall pride perpetuate the score ?
Who first forgive, they only win :
Let fall your arms and fight no more !
Each would be master, both waxed wroth,
And, hot for conquest flung the glove :
Neither seeks mastery now : let both
Make haste to bind the bonds of love !

One in our faith, in freedom one,
We stand above our heroes' grave :
Shall we the reconcilement shun,—
The proffered hand that weds the brave ?
'Twas blow for blow we struck, and you
Gave back our blows as strong men should :
Valiant in fight, in friendship true,
Come bind the bonds of brotherhood !

Around us once the fires of Spain
Burned, but were impotent to quell;
Both grappled with the accursèd chain,
Both hurled the oppressor back to hell:
That was the strife of sons of God,
Whom woe may weld and sorrow prove:
Oh, keep the path our fathers trod
And haste to bind the bonds of love!

Forgotten soon the helots' shame,
The raiders' ravine well atoned,
When Boer and Briton both acclaim
Justice by equal laws enthroned.
Manful it is for right to stand,
But base on buried wrong to brood:
Rise up and give the foe your hand!
Come bind the bonds of brotherhood!

Freedom is won, a frontier lost:
For this they died, and not in vain,
Whom now we weep; a valiant host
That don their crown and doff their pain,
Smiling that foemen's heirs may wed
To rear the realm for which they strove,
And build to praise the deathless dead
A living monument of love.

Scions of Wycliffe's race, and ye
The heroes of Erasmus' blood,
Unite your land in liberty,
And bind the bonds of brotherhood!

MAYPOLE CHORUS

THE Maypole ! The Maypole !
We're dancing round the Maypole,
And every mettlesome lass shall trip it
Light as a falling leaf.
(*Sola*) " Let go my girdle, Willie !
And never no more be silly !
Whatever you do, I'll never love you ;
For marrying's Dutch for grief."

Semi-chorus, without dancing.

As I was walking down the lane
I heard a cowslip call :
" Your waist has grown so slender, Jane,
Your head so fair and tall,
No longer you stoop to pick me now,
And if Rob should come and say,
' I've plucked the flowers and kissed them ! '—
You would toss my blossoms away."

Maypole Chorus.

The Maypole ! The Maypole !
We're dancing round the Maypole,
And lads and mettlesome lasses trip it
Light as the dropping rain.

(*Solus*) " You'll marry me soon, my Fanny ? "
(*Sola*) " No, no ! Begone, my manny !
You'll never have money to keep a lass,
So trouble me never again ! "

Semi-chorus, without dancing.

As I was walking by the brook
Forget-me-not was there :
He gave me such an impudent look ;
He said " You're tall and fair :
Rob plucks and kisses and gives to you
A nosegay of our best :
You throw them away, and come again,
And bury them in your breast ! "

(*Sola*) Now prithee, John, don't tease me ;
I swear you do not please me !
Laddie, you never shall kiss me, though
You die for a kiss all day.

Maypole Chorus.

The Maypole ! The Maypole !
We're dancing round the Maypole !
And every mettlesome lass shall trip it
Merrily all the way.

IN MEMORY OF A CHILD-POET [19]

L. L.

Who died at school, February 18, 1907, on the eve of his 11th birthday.

THERE is a song the great Musician made,
So brief, so brave, one smile and all was said:
A full tide from the far untravelled main,
Landward it drew, rose, shone and sank again.

Brief song, bright wave, what crimson weeds are these
Dropt at our feet, fragrant of gauzy seas?
What waking wonder of the dazzled eyes?
What lark-notes thrilled, blue drops of liquid skies?

In one deep chord the song was perfected:
"We live a little while," the bright voice said,
Breaking,—still brave: "Mother, I did my best."
And then they knew the fluttered heart had rest.

Such rest is sleep: the waking fawn would roam
Fresh pathless moors, green wonder-vales his home,
Still quaffing loveliness from lakelets pale,
Mirrors of Morning in her purple veil:

Infinite loveliness, not rest he craves:
Fawn of the fells, wing'd swallow of the waves,
Glad elf of dawn, child-mariner was he:
Lo, there his barque, white on the glittering sea!

MONICA PEVERIL TURNBULL

[With Violets for her Grave.]

[Heroine and poetess, her life was sacrificed in the effort to save her sister from fire. A presage of this catastrophe seems to be recorded in lines written by her just before the accident.]

Once more wild March, her mantle shaken
  In scudding clouds and gales,
Breathes sorrow through the russet bracken:
  Sappho has fled the Dales:
Her "king's robe stained with blood" lies doft,
And bare the hill and brown the croft
Trod by her singing footsteps oft,
    But now forsaken.

Clouds on the crags, deep-cleft and hoary,
  Dream in a mist of tears
Of that brief pageant of her story
  That golden sheaf of years,
Since, laughing there when Spring was young,
Around her breast a wreath she flung
Of smoke-weed, tipped with fiery tongue,
    Pale fumitory:

Sad omen ! Sure in wild caress
Even the flames might be
Changed by her virgin perfectness
To such sweet garlandry ;
Such rainbow robes as weeping weaves,
When Hope re-twines her ravished leaves,
And clothes the form no Spring retrieves
With angel dress :

Saint, heroine, victress ! yet for her
What solace ? Now no more
The beckoning beauty everywhere
Shall her bright wings explore ?
Our bird is slain ; the throstle's note
Scarce bubbled ere the arrow smote
And hushed the sweet song in her throat,
Transfixed it there,—

Froze its first rapture. So the gloom
Of imminent steeps of Death
Purples with shade the pasque-flower's bloom
And chokes the rose's breath :
For oft to songs our Sappho sings
A wild and haunting shadow clings,
Oft 'neath her girlish treble rings
The note of doom.

So in mid flight o'er oceans blue
The swallow, seeking May,
Sees a dark shadow-bird pursue,
Glassed through the hissing spray.

Shall Sappho find her May? That hour
The Scytheman smote our singing flower
A shape, a Phantom crossed her bower,
Stealthy as dew,

Pale, dreamlike, vague. In fear's embrace
Her waiting spirit lay;
Strong lamplight fell upon his face,—
Or was it the light of Day?
Not terrible now, her songs being done,
He only smiled, that shining One
To hear the glad notes ne'er outrun
The mournful bass.[20]

At dawn she dreamed; Death's flame, or Day's,
Wrapt her sweet limbs that night:
Dear, did One smile his perfect praise
And clothe your song with light?
Smiling, men set the ultimate task
Who know it conquered ere they ask,—
Now shall the Victor doff the casque
And don the bays?

Stricken with dreams, by terrors shaken,
Dreams whisper that we dream:
When night by day is overtaken
How vain those terrors seem!
Our sense, spell-bound by earth and sun,
Weaves solids where the world has none;
Living we sleep; new dreams are spun
When sleepers waken.

What shall the nurseling leaf affirm
Of the oak's unravellings ?
What the blind plasm, the groping worm
Of soul or song-bird's wings ?
These, narrow of sense, dim caves surround,—
Us the wide heavens ; new frontiers bound,
New glories, new delights astound
The expanded germ.

In rhythmic sleep, its petals blown,
Fresh fields the fruit inherits ;
Dark skies with countless worlds are sown,
Dark years with countless spirits ;
Epics inscribed on myriad scrolls,
Worlds in Time's womb are all men's souls :
From world to answering world life rolls
Its antiphone,—

Deathless through change : o'er times remote
Life's sequent chords unite ;
Theme calls to theme ; they wreathe and float,
Fragrant of the infinite.
For life integral there is none,
But waves that in one river run,
Æons made moments, felt as one,
Note linked with note.

Nor, of this world alone, one clod,
One swift electric brain :
The ferrule's here, the fulcrate rod
Quivers through space amain.[21]

Souls flame up on his anvil: He,
The Smithy, sits in ether free;
He wields the orbs in majesty,—
His name is God.

Like dust the stars His mind enrolls,
And pours them out in Light,—
Like stars this dust our life controls,
Then looses, and takes flight.
Stars are they? Nay, but song and thrill,
Keen lambent thought evoked at will,
His stuff and ours,—for he is Will,
Soul of all souls.

For, lo, this filmy universe
Pierced by the tunèd ray,
What arras front,—no frayed reverse,—
Its galaxies display!
Vast regions lie behind: ah, there,
Well shapen still,—her soul was fair,—
Breathes she the jocund balmy air,
The bruised wing's nurse?

Brave song that broke in dropping tears,—
Dawn dashed to-night,—thy close
Waits in this music of the spheres
Some birth to solve its throes;
Some bloom to break the perished husk,
And fill the night with fragrant musk,—
Some wings heard fluttering in the dusk
Ere new dawn peers.

For, Sappho, Dante never hymned
A heavenlier grace than thine,
Pheidias ne'er wrought, nor Raphael limned
Madonna more divine !—
Mirthful she was, broad visioned, wise,
Keen-laughtered, constant, and her eyes
Shone with compassion,—moonlit skies,
Clear, deep, undimmed.

Dark prophets they, who deem Fate's fools
Are all things wise and fair,—
Who dredge for spawn in dead-sea pools,
And read life's meaning there !
More truths of heaven and earth we trace,—
More searchings-out of time and space,—
More wisdom in one woman's face
Than all the schools.

Breathe, then, of fragrant Spring's foretelling,—
First murmuring of her breath,—
Violets, blue violets, breathe dispelling
The heavy mists of death ;
Breathe, emblem of her sweetness here,—
Breathe your last breath upon her bier ;
Whisper " Earth's bloom turns only sere
For new buds' swelling."

TO MY DAUGHTER OLIVE

Dear, are they proud, whose leafy pomp outshone
  Proud Solomon in all his glory decked ?
Upon their errands bees and birds are gone ;
  They sleep ; the fields with little robes are flecked,
Dipped in the sunset pools of damask hue,
In mauve of dawn, or deep meridian blue.

Dear, are they proud, who, flushed with Fortune's kiss,
  Breathe homage, large in acres, honour, might,
Wealth without yoke, Fame with no after-hiss,—
  Who wear the sword Fame buckles on, to smite
For noble cause, refreshed in gardens fair
Where jets of music splash the golden air ?

But prouder I, the shadow-born, to raise
  Sunward your soul, that rose by a shining stream
Swift flowing, full of sky, that makes our days
  Go singing like rare music, or a dream
One sleeps to dream again ; for, dear, your love
Strews flowers beneath us, holy stars above.

NOTES

CONSTANTINE THE GREAT

[1] *Page* 252, *line* 6: "*Emancipate the crafts and curials.*" Under Roman law all craftsmen were as serfs, bound for ever, they and their descendants, to toil and marry in the same guild, their property being at the disposal of the State. The curial classes [1] were, in the fourth century, bankrupt from the buffets of incessant invasion: they fled the cities, hid as menial slaves, were hunted from their hiding, denied the asylum of church and temple, tortured, flogged with loaded whips. These were the kyrioi, the city lords, whose title the devout had once thought worthy of Jehovah and Christ. Below them in social grade were the despised merchants, and the slaves confessed; above them the senatorial plutocracy, heirs, I suppose, of those corrupt officials, public informers and imperial panders, who crowd the lurid pages of Tacitus and Juvenal. They owned no duty, offered no military service, corrupted justice, crushed their neighbours, sluggardised in palatial baths, scrawled elegant prose and verse, and yawned with unconcern safe behind their castle walls while the Empire fell to pieces around them. "How fit," said Tiberius several centuries before,—"how fit is this nation to be slaves." And slaves in spirit for the most part they were, stoics and Christians excepted, mutilating their hands to escape the dangers of self-defence, selling wife, parent, and child, for sufferance from an Emperor often no better than chief ruffian of a barbaric and mercenary army.

[2] *Page* 262, *line* 11: "*A picaninny plucking flowers.*" A friendly critic resents this as modern slang. I plead Shakespeare, *Tempest* III. ii. 71: "What a pied ninny 's this?" Pied [motley-dressed]

[1] See Dill, *Later Roman Society*.

ninny, *i.e.* child=pica 'niña. The Spanish enters by Elizabethan as well as South American English.

[3] *Page* 266, *line* 11: "*MAXIMIAN. I cannot read.*" Gibbon infers that he could not, from Mamertinus, *Paneg. Vet.* ii. 8. He began as a common soldier, like his fellow-Emperors and contemporaries, Diocletian, Licinius, Galerius, Maximin, and others, before and afterwards, among whom we may recall that earlier Maximin (A.D. 235) who ruled the Western World, Virgil's nation and Cicero's, by virtue of a stature of 8 feet, and a daily appetite of 40 lbs. of beef.

[4] *Page* 272, *line* 29: "*It wells, it grows, absorbs the old and new.*" "Every scribe instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old" (Matt. xiii. 52).

[5] *Page* 277, *line* 12: "*When the hoc habet sounds.*" The sign by which the audience directed the gladiator to butcher his beaten antagonist.

[6] *Page* 281, *line* 16: ". . . *And dug my plot like Diocles, who brags of cabbages, not kingdoms.*" Maximian had abdicated with his colleague in the purple, the great Diocletian, originally Diocles. After his retirement Diocletian wrote preferring the cabbages he was growing to the kingdoms he once ruled; but Maximian was less philosophic. Diocletian paid dearly for the joy of his cabbages; for Licinius, whom he had raised to the purple, rewarded him by hunting to death his innocent wife and daughter.

[7] *Page* 300, *line* 10: "*Constantine rules alone. The world is Christ's.*" Crispus gave Europe to Christianity, as Themistocles saved Europe for the Europeans, as Drake and Nelson gave the New Worlds to the English, as Togo saved the East for the Mongolians—sea-victories all. But the battle is less to the admiral than to the *morale*. A Nelson or Togo would call in vain for duty and self-abnegation from a race educated on modern immoralism,—that new philosophic vogue which denies all Right and Duty.

[8] *Act III., Scene II.* Those who are curious as to this scene may find hints of its probability in Hippolytus, *Refut.* (*circa* A.D. 230),

and Apuleius, *Met.* xi., besides, as to details, earlier and more familiar authors. The phenomenon of crystal-gazing I have referred to hypnotism, but Mr. Andrew Lang regards it as possibly distinct.

[9] *Act IV., Opening scenes.* Sociologists will accuse me of anachronism. Straining at evidence of evolution within the historic period, they argue that romantic love is merely a modern by-product of sexuality, undreamt of in classic times. What, then, of a Haemon and Antigone, a Ceyx and Alcyone, a " Te teneam moriens deficiente manu " ? Mrs. F. A. Steel tells me of the extremes of romantic love in India 3000 years ago. Romance may have been rarer in those times ; it certainly existed.

[10] *Closing scene.* Crispus is, however, supposed to have been executed at Pola in Istria, and some modern historians have cast doubt on his innocence—for what reason I know not. It is well attested by opposed historians of the time. Fausta was, on the discovery of her guilt and his innocence suffocated in a bath.

THE GUANCHES

[11] *Page* 356, *line* 30 : The Guanches wore softened goat-skins.

[12] *Page* 375, *line* 9 : The Jewish practice. See Llorente, cap. 5.

[13] *Page* 385, *line* 3 : The Sun-god, by whom the Guanches swore.

[14] *Page* 390, *line* 30 : The Guanches dwelt generally in caves.

LYRICS

[15] *Page* 422, *line* 20 : Italian mercenaries at first, German afterwards. The hanging of one Italian seems to be the only act of violence done in cold blood with which Holinshed can definitely charge the insurgents ; but he adds that, being masters of the city, " These unrulie persons were so farre stept into all kinds of outrage that when it rained they would kenell up themselves in the churches."

[16] *Page* 424, *line* 28 : " ' Shall we hold the plough ourselves, plaie the carter, and labour the ground with our owne hands ? ' These and such like words, tasting altogither of mercie and compassion in this noble earle [Warwick] did quench the desire . . . to see the whole multitude [17,000] executed."—HOLINSHED.

[17] *Page* 447 : The Park, of which the author here renders faithfully his infantile impressions, was that of the Earl of Essex, called Cassiobury Park, in Hertfordshire.

[18] *Page* 460: Renan, in *Marc Aurèle*, dismisses this ancient legend with the observation, "tout ce que les Manichéens racontèrent des missions de St Thomas dans l'Inde est fabuleux." St. Augustine, mindful of his old Manichaean heresy, bears witness to the acceptance of these writings as sacred scriptures among that sect; and himself gives at least so much credence to the narrative as to be greatly exercised concerning the incident of the black dog. For the Apostle, so he observes, was struck but lightly, with the palm of the hand; and yet he caused the offender's whole body to be torn in pieces: and this in the name of Him who had bidden turn both cheeks to the smiter. "Quid hoc videri crudelius potest?" asks the saint. But elsewhere: "Ut et Apostolus per hunc timorem commendaretur ignotis, et illi post hanc vitam quandoque finiendam in aeternum consuleretur."

Our rhyme traverses none of the probabilities when it calls the song, put in the mouth of the Galilean apostle, a "Galilean stave," for the Syrian influence was there notoriously predominant. But it seems likely that the actual author was Bar-Daisan, of Edessa, who was a contemporary of Apuleius.

[19] *Page* 518: H. G. Lewis Lewis. See *Spectator*, May 11, 1907. George Meredith, touched by the event, in his 80th year became godfather to the child's small brother.

[20] *Page* 521, *line* 12:

"My armour of content Shrivelled and fell away:
Naked to what was coming My waiting spirit lay. . . ."
"You sat where the yellow lamplight Fell broad and bright as day," etc.; the rest as here paraphrased.

Thus the prophetic vision: the accident was caused by a fallen lamp. See *A Short Day's Work*. John Murray, 1905.

[21] *Pages* 439, 507, *and* 522: "Electrical Mass [whole Mass being, it is argued, electrical] has its origin in the region round the corpuscle, and is not resident in the corpuscle itself; hence from one point of view, each corpuscle may be said to extend throughout the whole universe; a result which is interesting in connection with the dogma that two bodies cannot occupy the same space."—Sir J. J. Thomson, O.M., *Corpuscular Theory of Matter*, p. 34.

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